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The Novels of Marie Corelli

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THE NOVELS OF MARIE CORELLI

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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VITA

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INTRODUCTION

Marie Corelli, journalist, lecturer, novelist, and poet, whose powers of invention were surpassed only by her lack of discipline, was an extraordinary best-seller for two decades from 1894 until the First World War. She, along with such other best-selling novelists as Hall Caine, Sir Rider Haggard, Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins, Olive Schreiner, and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, gave the public whatever it demanded, although, at the same time, she, probably more than any of the best-sellers, combined in her stories sincerity with an unusual number of favorite topics of the late Victorian era. The occult, the pseudo-scientific, the religious--all find their place beside a variety of social motifs in Miss Corelli's ten prophetic novels. Although she wrote over two dozen novels and novelettes, Miss Corelli's religious romances, which are marked by her most imaginative flights, as well as her flare for the horrifyingly dramatic, are, with a few exceptions, her most excitingly entertaining stories. Primarily a novelist, Miss Corelli was equally prominent--or possibly notorious--as the vociferous protector of Shakespeare's plays and Shakespeare's Stratford-on-Avon, as well as the vigorous castigator of atheists, brewers, high society, journalists, organized religion, men, machines, and new women.

A social climber, Miss Corelli eagerly courted the favor of kings and queens and other eminent personages--all the while deliberately concealing or distorting the facts of her own life in order to secure for herself in the minds of her readers the image of the eternally youthful ingenue of mysterious Italian-Scottish origins. She, like the heroines of her novels, wore wispy white gowns decorated over with gigantic sprays of lilies, pansies, and roses; and she allowed but a few official photographs to be taken of herself. Her lengthy novels, melodramatic and repetitious in their characterizations and harangues, were carefully penned by hand, and they always closed with little prayers which the author pretentiously sealed into the back covers. But, then, Marie Corelli had almost convinced herself that she was a mystic who had been ordained to convert England from unfaith and sectarianism to a belief in the hidden powers of the soul and the true message of Christ--the electric cable between man and God.

After an era of unprecedented popularity which saw lines of people outside of bookshops awaiting each of her new novels; mothers happily naming their daughters Thelma for the heroine of her Norwegian romance; and clerics elbowing each other to get to the pulpit to praise the piety of her romances, Marie Corelli's reputation was bound to fade. Of late, however, there has been not only a resurgence of recognition for Marie Corelli the enigmatic personality, but also a small ripple of scholarly interest, probably for the first time since 1910, in Marie

Corelli the novelist. We believe, therefore, that this study of Miss Corelli, which attempts the first detailed analysis of her novels, is timely in its endeavor to assess to what extent Miss Corelli was influenced by the romantic Victorian tradition and to what extent she transcended that tradition, especially in her religious, pseudo-scientific, prophetic novels.

CHAPTER I

LIFE

Marie Corelli, one of the most popular English novelists at the turn of the twentieth-century, was paradoxically both a well-known, yet an unknown personality. Certainly, there is no lack of material on this author's life. In addition to several articles and brief notations by scholars of yesterday and today in various accounts of the novels of the Victorian era, two adulatory biographies appeared in 1901¹ and 1903² respectively, when Miss Corelli was still in her late forties; again, in 1930, six years after her death, her lifelong companion Bertha Vyver published her memoirs of the novelist;³ and since 1940 three full-length studies have been written. Two of these, by George Bullock⁴ and Eileen Bigland,⁵ are biographical; the third is a pompous account by a Presbyterian minister of his friendship with the novelist, whom he knew

¹Kent Carr, Miss Marie Corelli ("Bijou Biographies," No. VIII; London, 1901).

²T. F. G. Coates and R. S. Warren Bell, Marie Corelli: The Writer and Woman (Philadelphia, 1903).

³Bertha Vyver, Memoirs of Marie Corelli (London, 1930).

⁴George Bullock, Marie Corelli: The Life and Death of a Best-Seller (London, 1940).

⁵Eileen Bigland, Marie Corelli: The Woman and the Legend (London, 1953).

from 1911 until her death--a friendship upon which he capitalized in numerous lectures on the author, some given as late as 1955.⁶ Of these six accounts, the two written during Miss Corelli's life, by Kent Carr and T. F. G. Coates and R. S. Warren Bell, must necessarily be considered the least satisfactory and trustworthy because they are incomplete and, even more importantly, because they rely solely on Miss Corelli for their information. Likewise, the biography by Miss Corelli's friend and confidante Bertha Vyver, in being distressingly sympathetic to its subject, tries to cover up such unpleasantness as Marie Corelli's illegitimate birth, while ignoring others, such as her love for the artist Arthur Severn. William Stuart Scott, who wrote the most recent study, treats his friendship with Marie Corelli only during her declining years; his work is more illuminating for its presentation of its despicable, egocentric author than for anything it has to say about Marie Corelli. The two most valuable studies, then, are the biographies by George Bullock and Eileen Bigland; and, although Mrs. Bigland obviously depends heavily upon the earlier work of George Bullock, Bullock's biography is marred by slight inaccuracies and a pedestrian style, whereas Mrs. Bigland's study is enhanced by a readable style, as well as by her personal knowledge of her subject.

In addition to the work of Miss Corelli's biographers, we must also evaluate the stories of Miss Corelli as a significant source of information

⁶William Stuart Scott, Marie Corelli: The Story of a Friendship (London, 1955).

about their author. All of Marie Corelli's novels are to some extent autobiographical; and two of them, Innocent (1914) and Open Confession (1925), are wholly autobiographical. Like Charlotte Brontë, whom she resembles in many other ways, Marie Corelli is a subjective artist whose works are a dialogue with herself. Her major characters, both male and female, portray her own emotions and impressions; her heroines--white-flowered, white-gowned, and iris-eyed--are unmistakably Marie Corelli herself. Until now, the facts of Miss Corelli's life, as sifted through the biographies and novels, have been studied for their own sensational interest; we intend, however, to deal with the biographical details only insofar as they become an intrinsic part of the author's work. Even then, as we will see, in spite of the apparent plethora of biographical material, which has, indeed, somewhat dispelled the cloud of perplexities once overshadowing the novelist's life, the artistic intentions of Miss Corelli must remain at least a partial enigma. As a lonely, sensitive child, she was undoubtedly very aware of a world beyond the one in which she lived; as a celebrated, but still lonely adult, she fostered the belief through her religious, pseudo-scientific novels that she was a true mystic who could see beyond the veil of this life. That her pretensions to mysticism were frequently merely a part of the novelist's pose cannot be questioned; that they were entirely so is impossible to determine. But whether these works are sincere portrayals of mystical revelations, as Miss Corelli claimed them to be, or whether they are the fantastic, colorful flights of an undisciplined imagination which their author eventually persuaded herself

were real--and the latter seems the more likely--they remain, along with the other dozen novels of this writer, not only a curious, exciting manifestation of the waning romanticism of one age, but also, at the same time, an anticipation of--often a protest against--an age to come.

In assessing the aspects of Marie Corelli's biography that are most pertinent to her work, we will limit ourselves to brief discussions of her birth and parentage and the confusion surrounding them; her early life and education and their influence on her writing; her debuts, first as an improvisator on the piano, then as a novelist, and the early popularity of her stories; her quarrel with the critics and her various Stratford-on-Avon crusades; her platonic affair with the painter Arthur Severn and its treatment in her novels; her later life, the waning of the popularity of her novels, and her death; and, finally, her electric creed and her other religious views primarily as revealed by her romances and her sincerity as a religious reformer.

Marie Corelli, or Mary Mackay as we must call her for a while, was born in May, 1855, the illegitimate daughter of Dr. Charles Mackay, a journalist and aspiring poet, and Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Mills, a widow whom Dr. Mackay married early in 1861, after a decent interval following the death of his first wife in December, 1859.⁷ It is probable that Marie Corelli did not

⁷

Bigland, pp. 18-19.

know the truth about her birth until the death of Dr. Mackay in 1889, and then attempted to conceal the facts with her own poetic version of her origin. Anyway, her early biographers, who obtained the bulk of their information from their subject, speak of her as either "adopted into the Mackay family through her mother's marriage with Dr. Charles Mackay,"⁸ or, with no mention of her mother, as "adopted, when but three months old, by Dr. Charles Mackay, that excellent journalist, poet, song writer, and author."⁹ Moreover, just to compound the confusion, Miss Corelli characteristically idealizes her background in an extravagant letter to her first publisher, George Bentley, dated February 9, 1886:

I am Venetian and can trace myself back to the famous musician Arcangelo Corelli; and I have a godfather residing in Rome to whom I owe the exceptional severity of the education I have had, first in Italy, next in France, and last and longest in England, which I have learnt to love with a melancholy affection as my mother died here. I am residing now en famille with the dearest and best English friends I have.¹⁰

⁸Carr, p. 8.

⁹Coates and Bell, p. 26.

¹⁰Letter from Marie Corelli, February 9, 1886, cited by Michael Sadleir, "The Camel's Back or the Last Tribulation of a Victorian Publisher," in Essays Mainly on the Nineteenth Century Presented to Sir Humphrey Milford (London, 1948), p. 136.

Needless to say, Marie Corelli was not only not a descendant of Arcangelo Corelli; but she had no godfather in Rome and had never even been to Italy. On January 29, 1890, after the death of Dr. Mackay, she wrote another mysterious letter to her publisher concerning her parentage--this one with at least a touch of genuine feeling:

I may truly say I have been in ignorance of my own history up to lately. Anyway I think it is but fair to tell you that, if you ever wish to know the history of my relationship to the dear old man who has gone, I will sincerely tell it to you, though to do so, will possibly seem to cast a slight aspersion on the memory of him and of my dear, sweet beautiful Venetian mother. . . . Any question you choose to ask shall be frankly answered--there are "romances" in every life, though not till ten days or more ago, did I know there was such a romance in mine.¹¹

Just as Marie Corelli repeatedly put her friends and particularly her enemies into her novels, so too in 1914 she published Innocent, one of her less fortunate efforts, which undoubtedly represents in its first book, "Her Fancy," a thinly disguised version of the shame that attended her discovery of her own illegitimacy. A true Victorian, Innocent nearly collapses at the news that she is not the real daughter of her beloved, dying father, but, as she learns later, the illegitimate daughter of a worthy artist and a brazen society beauty. Innocent's reaction to her adopted father's confession is pitched in a blatantly high key:

¹¹Letter from Marie Corelli, January 29, 1890, Ibid., p. 140.

"Oh, help me, Dad!" she said piteously--"Comfort me! Say something--anything! I feel so lost--so astray! All my life seems gone!--I can't realize it! Yes, I know! You have been very kind,--all kindness, just as if I had been your own little girl. Oh, why did you tell me I was your own?--I was so proud to be your daughter--and now--it's so hard--so hard! Only a few moments ago I was a happy girl with a loving father as I thought--now I know I'm only a poor nameless creature,--deserted by my parents and left on your hands. Oh, Dad dear! I've given you years of trouble!--I hope I've been good to you! It's not my fault that I am what I am!"¹²

After the death of her father, Innocent leaves her beautiful country home and her cousin who loves her to make a name of her own as a lady novelist in wicked London. The rest of her tragic story is the fictionalized tale of Marie Corelli's own unhappy love experience. Romantic, lonely, self-educated in medieval literatures, garbed in white, and attended by doves, Innocent is only a little more Marie Corelli than the heroines of most of the other novels. And if Marie Corelli was reticent about her birth and encouraged the proliferation of sentimental legends concerning her origin, it was simply that she, like Innocent, was a vain child of the Victorian era for whom illegitimacy was a disgrace.

Minnie Mackay's first ten years were spent in London, where she and her mother presumably lived on an allowance from Dr. Mackay, a gentleman whose financial status was occasionally precarious. In 1865 she went to live at Fern Dell, a rambling old country house set in a profusion of

¹²Marie Corelli, Innocent (New York, 1914), p. 52.

greenery similar to the homes of many of her heroines; she was just next-door to one of her lifelong supporters, George Meredith.¹³ She rapidly gained the favor of Charles Mackay, who, of the four children by his first marriage, had seemingly lavished all of his tenderness on a daughter who had died at the age of seventeen. Since he soon became convinced that his "wee Rosebud" was as much of a genius as he certainly felt himself to be, he constantly reminded her of her responsibility of some day alleviating the family's financial difficulties. Probably with this end in mind, he undertook the supervision of her studies; he lectured her incessantly on politics and literature; he choked her memory with reams of poetry; and encouraged her playing and singing at the piano, particularly her performance of Chopin waltzes.¹⁴ Minnie read whatever she chose; and unquestionably her later literary opinions--intransigent, often paradoxical, but ever boldly expressed--were beginning to be molded at this time. She would always write glowingly in her novels of Shakespeare, Scott, the early Romantic poets, Dickens, and Tennyson; but she conceived such a passionate antipathy toward the realistic movement in literature that French novels, especially those of Zola, are invariably associated with the villains and villainesses of her works. Her comments on Browning, Hardy, Swinburne, Tolstoy, Whitman, and her other contemporaries are, like all of her comments,

¹³Bigland, p. 23.

¹⁴Ibid, pp. 27-28.

mercilessly incisive. In her one book of satirical essays, The Silver Domino; or Side Whispers, Social and Literary, published anonymously in 1895, she speaks of Swinburne as "a lewd atheist";¹⁵ of Tolstoy's The Kreutzer Sonata as imported "trash" (The Silver Domino, pp. 238-239); and of Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles as an "entirely hateful book" (The Silver Domino, p. 152). Kipling is "only a smart newspaper man" (The Silver Domino, p. 272); and Meredith, her old friend, is a "hopelessly obstinate fixture in the 'groove' of literary delirium" (The Silver Domino, p. 144). How she reconciled these pious, anti-realistic, anti-skeptical sentiments with her stand against the bowdlerization of Shakespeare and her admiration for Tennyson and Byron, especially the latter's Don Juan, cannot be readily explained. As we will see, however, Miss Corelli's unrestrained denunciations of realistic, agnostic literature are a recurring pattern in her novels. To be sure, her greatest failings as a writer and woman--her inconsistency, lack of discipline, and splendid egotism--can easily be traced to the formative years she spent in her father's extensive library under her father's haphazard tutelage. In her novels she was loudly to defend her own upbringing at the expense of the British and French educational systems, which, although she knew nothing about them, she pilloried as godless, impractical, and cruelly conformist. The Mighty Atom and Boy depict the horrors of conventional education to an extreme,

¹⁵[Marie Corelli], The Silver Domino (London, 1895), pp. 238-239.

even as many of her other romances, while representing the heroine as self-educated in her father's library, contain didactic denunciations of the way in which a Victorian boy was usually schooled. But, if she was loyal to the unorthodox methods Dr. Mackay used in rearing her at least in her early novels, as an older woman she wrote in Open Confession, a work published in 1925 after her death, ordinarily classified as a novel but scarcely more than a thinly disguised memoir:

For I have been lonely all my life,--as a child I was one of the most solitary ever born. I was not allowed to play with other children; and I had no games, no diversions of any kind. I lived with elderly folk, and my only companions were books--fine books certainly,--written by the fine-brained authors of a bygone era; nevertheless hard reading for a child, especially a girl-child. However it happened I do not know, but I learned to love those books more than human society, with the result that I was considered a "strange" child, "old-fashioned" and a "dreamer." Yes! "dreamer" I certainly was and "dreamer" I have always been.¹⁶

And the little dreamer of ten years old who declared to her father that she yearned to fly to the moon and that she could see her angel and God Himself became the novelist who confidently put astonishing electrical and radium inventions, other worlds, spirits from Heaven and Hell, and Christ and His Apostles into her romances--the novelist whose marvelous tales were not intended as mere light entertainment but as divinely inspired revelations.

When Minnie Mackay was twelve years of age she was subjected to a series of governesses who attempted unsuccessfully the unenviable task of training

¹⁶Marie Corelli, Open Confession (New York, 1925), pp. 144-145.

the now thoroughly spoiled child. Next, as far as we can tell, when she was fourteen, Minnie was either sent to a convent in France or to a school in England staffed by nuns.¹⁷ During the six months that she spent at this institution, the young girl wrote a number of poems and the score of an opera, Ginevra Da Siena.¹⁸ As a middle-aged woman, determined to be regarded as a mystic, she confided to her earliest biographer concerning this period in her life:

I became for a time. . . so absorbed in the mysteries of the religious life, that I had some vague ideas of founding a 'New Order' and of being the leader of an entirely original community of Christian workers, who should indeed follow Christ in spirit and in truth. Fond of solitude and meditation, I was what my school companions called devotee, and was given to much reading and thought. I passed most of the hours of relaxation in the convent chapel, playing and improvising melodies on the great organ near the altar, preferring this mode of occupying myself to the games of croquet, tennis, and archery in which all were permitted to engage.¹⁹

How or why Minnie left the convent is not known; nevertheless, at fifteen or sixteen, she returned to Fern Dell to spend the following six years under the strict regimen of Dr. Mackay, who not only expected her to devote six hours of every day to preparing for a concert career, but likewise to take charge of the household, to read to him, to take him for walks, and to listen to his interminable reminiscences of famous literary

¹⁷Bigland, p. 39.

¹⁸Coates and Bell, p. 35.

¹⁹Carr, p. 12.

personalities.²⁰ In 1876, however, with the death of her mother, who seems to have been a withdrawn, ailing woman about whom little has been uncovered, Minnie Mackay suddenly found herself relieved of her numerous household tasks by Bertha Vyver, a girl of almost her own age and the daughter of the Countess Vyver, once celebrated for her beauty at the Court of Napoleon III, whom Charles Mackay had known for many years and whose daughter, under what circumstances we cannot tell, now became a permanent member of the Mackay family.²¹ When in 1883 Dr. Mackay himself, almost seventy, had a stroke from which he was not expected to recover, Minnie and Bertha decided to move to Kensington, where the Doctor would have medical attention at hand. Meanwhile, George Eric, Minnie's half-brother, had been summoned to his father's bedside from Italy, where he had been living a precariously itinerant existence as a singer, writer, actor, newspaper correspondent, editor, and secretary to various renowned men. George Eric is described as "fat, flabby, and forty-eight" with a "singularly unprepossessing character"²² Notwithstanding the fact that everything George Eric undertook seems to have turned out fifth-rate, like his father, he was convinced of his own genius; and Minnie was assuredly delighted, at least for a little while, by the thought that the whole family would some day be distinguished for its creativity. But Eric

²⁰Bigland, pp. 46-47.

²¹Ibid., p. 52.

²²Ibid., p. 59.

Mackay's alternate efforts first to get his poetry published and circulated at the expense of his family and his father's friends; next to get his plays produced; and, finally, at considerable financial sacrifice to his sister and her friend Bertha, to become a successful violinist--all, in every respect, turned out to be failures. His arrogance, coupled with his father's peevishness, was, in part, responsible for Marie Corelli's vicious, satirical attacks on husbands, lovers, and relatives, who, while benefiting from the industrious women in their lives, exhibit no appreciation to their faces and slander them behind their backs.

In 1884, at the age of twenty-nine, Minnie Mackay, now Signorina Marie Corelli, gave an improvisation on the piano consisting of fifteen pieces, composed in the presence of an illustrious audience, which included Algernon Swinburne, several of whose poems she set to music on the occasion; Theodore Watts-Dunton; and a number of music critics--all of whom were very enthusiastic.²³ After several concerts, however, Marie Corelli, whose father had not allowed her to practice scales and exercises, probably realized that she could not make a career out of music--that her appearance on the stage as an improvisatrice was only a short-lived novelty. But her father and her brother needed money and Miss Corelli was not to be discouraged; she merely poured her flood of creative energy into another channel--writing. Thus, following the publication of some sonnets and an article, Marie Corelli wrote

²³Ibid., pp. 62-63.

A Romance of Two Worlds, which was published in 1886 when the author was already thirty-two, although from about this time she was consistently to give her age as ten years younger than she actually was. When a handful of half-hearted reviews--the Athenaeum was almost favorable²⁴--greeted the debut of Marie Corelli, the novelist, she assumed in life and through the heroines of her novels the enduring mask of the great and noble female artist wilfully abused or ignored by the cliquy literary magazines and jealous male literary hacks. As if to prove her correct, sales of the book mounted so that a year later, from an enormous correspondence, Miss Corelli carefully chose ten adulatory letters to form a part of the appendix when the work appeared in Bentley's "Favourite Series." These letters, which are so peculiarly similar in style and punctuation as to suggest that Miss Corelli either edited or

²⁴"A Romance of Two Worlds," Athenaeum, LXXXVIII (March 13, 1886), 356. The anonymous review reads: "The prologue, well peppered with italics, of 'A Romance of Two Worlds' is so serious and didactic in its tone that one is compelled to accept Marie Corelli and her story in good faith, as being not consciously deceptive or misleading. If the author does not believe in the double life and the power of physical transportation which she describes, but simply wishes to throw dust in the eyes of her readers and create a romantic illusion, then she has said a great deal more in her preface than there was any need to say. On the other hand, if she does believe in the nonsense on which her incidents turn, and wishes to produce a belief in the minds of others, she should not have called her narrative a romance. This is only by the way. The book will make no converts, but considered as a romance pure and simple it may entertain its readers not a little. The style, at any rate, is unexceptionable, and the ideas are for the most part elevated and refined. Marie Corelli is not the first who has attributed wonderful curative powers to electricity, but she may fairly claim to have done it in an original fashion."

possibly composed them herself, are nearly as strange as the electrical romance itself. A section from one reads:

Your book seemed to give me just what I wanted--it has deepened and strengthened my belief in and love to God, and has made the New Testament a new book to me. Things which I could not understand before seem clear in the light which your 'Vision' has thrown upon them. . . .

Still another states:

I never thought of or read of the electric force (or spirit) in every human being before, but I do believe in it after reading your book, and you have made the next world a living thing to me, and raised my feelings above the disappointments and trials of this life. . . .

Finally, a clergyman confesses:

Your book, the 'Romance of Two Worlds,' has stopped me on the brink of what is doubtless a crime, and yet I had come to think it the only way out of impending madness. I speak of self-destruction--suicide. And while writing the word, I beg of you to accept my gratitude for the timely rescue of my soul.²⁵

We might also add that Miss Corelli appended a pious introduction and closing commentary to this edition of her first romance which leave us with little question that she had come to think of herself as the high priestess and interpreter of a new Christianity.

Within the next few years Marie Corelli became famous--not only as the author of numerous best-selling romances, but likewise as a prominent social figure and crusader. Her life was not without its shadows, of course: her father died in 1889, without having achieved the recognition which he

²⁵Marie Corelli, A Romance of Two Worlds (New York, n. d.), pp. 312-314.

thought his due; she herself spent several years recovering from an operation that was performed in 1897; and Eric Mackay, whose parasitical demands she had nourished and whose literary cause she had espoused even to the ridiculous extent of attempting to arrange that he be chosen Poet Laureate, died suddenly the following year, leaving his sister a legacy of odious rumors which he had started in order to promote the sale of her books.²⁶ To be sure, he had cautiously let slip that, in reality, he was the author of her novels; and, more fantastic yet, that he was carrying on a Byronic relationship with her, a notion which must have seemed wholly absurd to those who were aware of Miss Corelli's idealized views on love.

One of the darkest shadows, however--one which seemed to loom forever upon the horizon--was the author's failure to win the critical applause that she knew she deserved. In 1895, after the publication of Barabbas, which the critics had assailed as indelicate and "impure" in its presentation of Christ, and erroneous in its interpretation of the Bible and its "vilification" of Christ,²⁷ Miss Corelli lashed back at her reviewers in an undiplomatically bitter article in The Idler in which she wrathfully abuses

²⁶Bigland, pp. 181-184.

²⁷See "The Theological Works of Marie Corelli," Living Age, XI (April 27, 1901), 201-208.

by name both journals and journalists.²⁸ Furthermore, in the same year, with the publication of her ninth major work, The Sorrows of Satan, one of her most popular romances, she established a precedent for the rest of her books with a special notice that she had printed on the first page stating that no copies of the romance were to be sent out for review but that members of the press could obtain their copies with the public from the booksellers and the libraries. It was almost in spite of herself, then, that Marie Corelli, imperious and intolerant, managed to attract a number of famous supporters--some of her friends were even literary lights. Among those who professed to be devoted readers of her novels were Sarasate, the violinist and composer, who claimed that Ardath had had a wonderful influence on him;²⁹ the Empress Frederick of Prussia, who insisted on meeting the author;³⁰

²⁸Marie Corelli, "Barabbas and After," The Idler, VII (1895), 120-134. In this article Miss Corelli attacks the Daily Chronicle; T. P. O'Conner of the Sun; W. L. Courtney of the Daily Telegraph; F. C. Burnand of Punch; the Speaker; the World; Grant Allen of the Graphic; the Literary World; Mr. Maccoll, the editor of the Athenaeum, whose reviews are referred to as "slovenly," and who is accused of being afraid to review Miss Corelli's novels; Mr. Zangwill of the Pall Mall Magazine; and finally Edmund Gosse, who, in speaking of Marie Corelli, reportedly stated that some writers have "the taint of popularity upon them." Miss Corelli notes, in considering the case of this minor poet, that "surely he cannot complain of this terrible blot on his career."

²⁹Sarasate also presented Miss Corelli with his own copy of the Zigeunerweisen inscribed: "Au grand Poète Ecrivain, Marie Corelli, son grand admirateur et bien reconnaissant serviteur, Pablo de Sarasate" (Cited by Bigland, p. 110).

³⁰Ibid., pp. 148-149.

Queen Victoria, who required that all of Miss Corelli's novels be forwarded to her;³¹ and William Gladstone, who, at least according to Miss Corelli, called upon her one day to praise her as "a thinker of no ordinary calibre. . . and a perfect mistress of the pen."³² On the subject of the latter interview, Miss Corelli's publisher, George Bentley, wrote in a letter dated June 11, 1889:

Genius recognizes genius; it is only mediocrity which is jealous. Genius is too full of richness to want others' laurels.³³

Again, the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, made Marie Corelli the toast of Homburg in the summer of 1892 by the particular attention which he paid to her; they presumably remained friends until the end of his life, although, for some undeterminable reason, she felt that the King might have been a little annoyed by the unfortunate delineation of him, the royal family, and the country which the demure artist painted in her Temporal Power, a romance published shortly after the King's coronation in August, 1902.

³¹George Bentley approves of the Queen's request in an undated letter to Miss Corelli: "Brave! Bravissimo!! dear Thelma, as one used to cry out in my old opera days, when the glorious Grisi denounced Pollie in Norma. I rejoice at your being recognized all round. . . and I hope it may be that Her Most Gracious Majesty will enjoy a trip into the two worlds of her bright little subject's creation, wherein the subject is Queen and the Queen her subject" (Cited by Coates and Bell, p. 147).

³²Letter of Marie Corelli, cited by Bigland, p. 109.

³³Letter from George Bentley, June 11, 1889, cited by Coates and Bell, p. 140.

In 1889, Tennyson, her father's old friend, wrote to Miss Corelli to commend her for Ardath;³⁴ in 1906, George Meredith supposedly wept--we hope for the right reasons--upon reading one of her most effusive novels, The Treasure of Heaven (1906);³⁵ Clement Scott, the eminent journalist, claimed her as a literary "godchild";³⁶ and Oscar Wilde concealed a sneer long enough to ask her to write for the magazine he was editing.³⁷ Similarly, Ellen Terry, Beerbohm Tree, and Robert Hichens were counted as her friends.³⁸

With the public the popularity of her novels was phenomenal. The appearance of each new novel was a memorable event which saw queues line up outside of booksellers as editions sold out in hours. Among her most popular stories were A Romance of Two Worlds and Thelma, which were still reprinted by Street & Smith in ten-cent copies as well as fine binding as late as 1930;³⁹ The Sorrows of Satan, which had a sale greater than any previous English novel; The Master Christian, which sold a quarter of a million

³⁴Ibid., p. 81.

³⁵Bullock, p. 189.

³⁶Ibid., p. 46.

³⁷Ibid., p. 68.

³⁸Bigland, p. 216.

³⁹Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States (New York, 1947), p. 179.

copies;⁴⁰ and Temporal Power. Bullock conservatively estimated her annual earnings as twenty thousand pounds.⁴¹ Her books were also translated into various foreign languages, including the oriental; plays and movies were made from them; and, in a moment of aberration, a group of "enthusiastic Americans" proposed building a "Corelli city in Fremont County, Colorado. . . on the Arkansas River, and a prospectus was actually issued explaining the project."⁴² And, notwithstanding her unorthodox religious opinions, several prominent clergymen fell under the spell of her religious novels. In 1893, the Dean of Westminster quoted Miss Corelli's description of the Resurrection from her Barabbas as the subject for his Easter morning sermon; Dean Wilberforce further complimented her on the same work;⁴³ moreover, we are told:

Mr. Spurgeon used The Sorrows of Satan to illustrate a powerful dissertation on evil that he preached in the Tabernacle; Father Vaughan advertised it to his congregation at Farm Street; and Father Ignatius, who was a monk at Llanthony Abbey, near Abergavenny, and one of the most fanatical men of his time, preached two sermons on the book at the Portman Rooms in Baker Street.⁴⁴

⁴⁰George Bullock, "The Corelli Wonder," Life and Letters To-day, XLI (1944), 144.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Coates and Bell, p. 81.

⁴³Bigland, pp. 145-146.

⁴⁴Bullock, Marie Corelli, p. 118.

Father Ignatius, a lifelong admirer of Miss Corelli's work, asserted on the occasion of his first sermon that she was a woman of "celestial eloquence," who was "doing more for the faith than Archbishops and Bishops and convocations put together"--that "there are thousands upon thousands throughout English-speaking Christendom who will bless the pages that Marie Corelli has penned."⁴⁵ As we will see, it is not without considerable justification that as late as 1961, writing on the subject of New Testament novels in England, Margaret M. Maison could declare:

. . . Marie Corelli saved the situation by rushing in where more learned novelists feared to tread. Not only did she popularize New Testament fiction in England, but she rescued the religious novel from the somewhat depressing rut of practical rationalism and pessimism into which it had fallen and exalted it into the glorious, miraculous, and often very dizzy heights of a most vivid and extraordinary Christocentric supernaturalism.⁴⁶

But if Miss Corelli had her coterie of friends and zealous admirers, she also, as we might expect, had her enemies, many of whom she had acquired on one or more of her famous crusades. We have already noted--and we will have occasion to give the matter fuller attention when we turn to the novels--her obstinate war with the press. In 1899 she moved to Stratford-upon-Avon, where she took up permanent residence in 1901 at Mason Croft, a fine Tudor house which she had restored in 1902. As early as 1900, however, Marie

⁴⁵Bigland, pp. 161-162.

⁴⁶Margaret M. Maison, The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel (New York, 1961), p. 330.

Corelli had fittingly forewarned the vicar of the parish church of her arrival; her curious letter, replying to one of his thanking her for a donation, was an intimation of the madness to come:

It is very sweet and kind of you to write me such a nice letter, and though I do not belong to your form of the Christian Faith, nor to the Roman Catholic form either, I have the greatest respect and reverence for both. I am one of a very numerous 'fraternity' (we are, perhaps, between 50,000 and 100,000 altogether)--who are bound to try our best to follow the teachings of Christ as enunciated by Himself--and we are not, by the rules of our Order, allowed to attend public worship, 'That we may be seen of men'. Our rules are somewhat difficult and arbitrary, and render us liable to a good deal of misconception--hence we have chosen as our motto, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer--I have overcome the world'. If you would like to form an idea of what we try to do, I will copy the 'Daily Paradise' from my little private Manual (each member of our Order has one), as I think it will rather interest you. We are all at one in our Faith in the Divinity of Jesus Christ and His Message, as being the only way to truth and life; of final salvation, so far as this earth and its inhabitants are concerned, and any doubter of this first grand principle would be requested to resign his or her membership. But we do not accept any of the Church forms. We simply, as far as it is humanely possible to do, obey the words of Christ as spoken by Himself--even at all risk of inconvenience to ourselves and misjudgment by our friends.

With regard to the Scriptures, I do not think any woman has ever studied them so deeply and devoutly as I have, or, let me say, more deeply and devoutly.

I have had the advantage of the teaching of one of the finest Hebrew scholars in Europe, and he has instructed me as to the actual weight and symbolic meaning of every word and line. My religion is my very life--I have no thought without it, or beyond it--and when I say I would give my whole self to death for it, you may judge it is no light matter with me.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cited by Bigland, pp. 191-192.

Whereas her latest biographer completely dismisses this letter as an example of one of Miss Corelli's flights of fancy, some of the ideas expressed are undoubtedly Rosicrucian in origin. That Miss Corelli was actually a member of this society is improbable since none of her biographers, including Bertha Vyver, her intimate companion, mentions the fact. It is true, nevertheless, as we will attempt to indicate later, that Rosicrucian thought represents a major influence on the author's prophetic novels--as, indeed, it was an influence on other novelists working in the romantic tradition.

If the vicar to whom this letter was addressed had reason to fear that Miss Corelli would prove a meddlesome eccentric, his anxieties must have been at least partially justified when some months afterwards she sent him a very different letter, offering to close his debt on the church provided that he prevent the admission of a modern bust into Shakespeare's Chancel. When the vicar refused to cooperate, Miss Corelli took the matter to the Court of Arches and won her case; all the same, many people, from county folk to small shopkeepers, resented her interference. And their indignation was not mollified by a succession of comparatively minor incidents in which Miss Corelli, now convinced that she was Shakespeare's protector, castigated the Memorial Theatre Committee for allowing bowdlerized Shakespeare to be performed; and, then, capped a series of skirmishes with the press by vigorously denying that her latest novel, Temporal Power, contained, quite coincidentally to be sure, satirical portraits of the King, as only gradually arousing himself from befuddled ineptitude; the Queen, as a cold, unloving wife; the Prime Minister and the Colonial Secretary, as seeking to take the

country into a jingoistic war; and several eminent Jewish journalists.⁴⁸

⁴⁸See W. T. Stead, "Marie Corelli's New Novel," The Review of Reviews, XXVI (1902), 312-316, for the journalist's identification of the various characters of the novel, which he calls "a tract for the guidance of the King," with real personages.

The Colonial Secretary of Miss Corelli's day was Joseph Chamberlain, the perfect counterpart of the Colonial Secretary of Miss Corelli's novel; and, although the author claimed that she had always spoken of Mr. Chamberlain in terms of "high praise," her nasty little satirical poem about him suggests the contrary:

Joe's Orchid

It took a little time to grow,
Joe!
The sprouting of its leaves was slow,
We know;
But now its shining buds unfold,
Bright as the glittering Transvaal gold;
'Tis worthy of a special "show."
Joe!

'Twas pestered by an insect foe,
Joe!
The horrid creature wouldn't go
Below;--
The native, gnawing, noxious Beer
Clung to its very root and core,
And tried your little temper so!
Joe!

.
Gorgeous the golden blossoms blow,
Joe!
Can England such a plant forego?
Why, no!
Your skill in Orchid cultivation
Has given us a conquered nation;--
But,--make you Premier? Oh, go slow!
Joe!

Marie Corelli, Poems, ed. Bertha Vyver (New York, 1926), pp. 91-92.

Once more, in December, 1902, she found it necessary to defend the sacred environs of Stratford-upon-Avon by opposing the destruction of five houses next to Shakespeare's home that were doomed to make way for a new library endowed by a loathsome, American millionaire Andrew Carnegie. The famous Stratford-on-Avon controversy raged bitterly on both sides until it was concluded with two of the houses being saved. As an anti-climax, Miss Corelli, in 1904, sued one of the newspapers for libel and was awarded a farthing damages. Two, and possibly three, of her subsequent novels, God's Good Man (1904), The Treasure of Heaven (1906), and Holy Orders (1908), bear veiled allusions to Stratford-on-Avon residents and Stratford-on-Avon quarrels. God's Good Man takes place near "Riversford" where unappreciative aristocrats and county folk ridicule or attempt to obstruct the local pastor's efforts to restore his Elizabethan church and where the villainous Oliver Leach puts the ax to old trees--an insufferable habit shared by some of Miss Corelli's neighbors. Like Archibald D. Flower, the Mayor of Stratford who had invited Carnegie to establish his Free Library in that town, one of the chief scoundrels of Holy Orders, the scene of which, by the way, is set in "Shadbrook," is a brewer. But, not satisfied with this rather direct cut at one of her opponents, Miss Corelli also thrusts long passages of dialogue concerning her various Stratford controversies into the mouths of her characters; and, at one point, attacks both the mayor and his father, Shakespeare's bowdlerizer, through the convenient mouthpiece of a wealthy American tourist:

. . . like all good Americans, I've been to Stratford-on-Avon. The first thing I heard there from a small boy who was 'touting' as a guide to the different places of interest, was that 'Shakespeare got droonk at Bidford.' When I had recovered from this dizzying shock, I was hit in the eye by the spectacle of a bizarre theatre on the banks of the classic Avon, as inartistic a pile of bricks as ever I beheld, and I was told it had been built by a brewer as a 'memorial' to Shakespeare. Then I grasped the architectural design, of course,--which is that of a glorified brewery, round vat and all complete. I likewise learned that the said brewer had edited a version of the Immortal Plays, with all the bits he considered 'naughty' cut out! Can you realize this impertinence of Beer made paramount! But that's not all. A brewer 'manages' the so-called 'national' Trust of the Bard's own birthplace--never was there anything 'national' so purely petty and parochial!--and actually uses the design of the bust over the historic grave in the church as a 'trade mark' on the label of his beer-bottles! Poor 'Gentle Willy'! A beery fate pursues his noble ghost, and I have sometimes thought the inscription on his tombstone ought to read thus:--

'Good Frende, for Jesus' sake forbear
 To mix mine ashes up with Beer,--
 Blest be ye man who spares my fame,
 And curst be traders in my name!'⁴⁹

As we will further observe, the three novels, God's Good Man, The Treasure Heaven, and Holy Orders, inveigh against brewers, journalists, careless automobile drivers, and other supposed enemies of the novelist.

Scorned by the townsfolk of Stratford, aware of the declining invitations to private and public functions, in 1906, at the age of fifty-one, Marie Corelli fell in love, apparently for the only time in her life. In short, she fell in love with Arthur Severn, a sixty-year old Royal Academician who was already married to Ruskin's niece. The prim Victorian

⁴⁹Marie Corelli, Holy Orders (New York, 1908), p. 340.

over-dramatized her one-sided romance with this flirtatious artist of little talent in her journal, published after her death as Open Confession:

Alas, poor woman as I am! I allow my mind to drift back to my childhood's days with a sense of pity. I was such a small and lonely creature; and my surroundings were those of cold indifferentism that sometimes surely verged on cruelty. I often think how greatly older persons are to blame in their treatment of sensitive children,--crushing all their young aspirations by a look or a word, as a hasty heel may crush a delicate butterfly or a reckless hand crush the beauty of a rose with absolute callousness. I grew up timid and frightened of all "superior" persons,--I had no consciousness of anything good or worthy in myself,--and the utter solitude of my soul was almost appalling in one so little and so young.

How wonderful it is,--after all these lonely years of mine--that you, with your life of brilliant experience, genius and knowledge--should love me,--me! I say "how wonderful" half rapturously, half fearfully, lest the luminous glory set round me like a halo by your love should suddenly vanish and I be left in the old darkness! You love me!--I say it over and over again as a singer may often repeat the phrasing of a song to make it perfect in the singing. You love me!--you tremble at my touch,--you are by turns caressing, dominant, passionate, clinging--demanding, receiving, giving--in all the moods of a love which will take no denial and which insists on the full measure of its ardent claim. (Open Confession, pp. 23, 25)

Her brief, self-pitying ecstasy continues for ten chapters and gives us a glimpse into what was evidently the painful reality behind an ostensibly glamorous, boisterous career. Hence, while Marie Corelli worked excitedly to advance Severn's reputation by persuading her friends to buy his paintings, by having a studio built for him in the garden at Mason Croft, and by publishing with him an elaborately illustrated version of one of her fantasies, The Devil's Motor (1911), he and his wealthy wife indulgently tolerated the author's effusive behavior, her sermons, her bronchitis, and even her cockney accent.

But Miss Corelli was preoccupied with more than the histrionics of her peculiar relationship with Arthur Severn in the ensuing years, which passed in a whirl of activity. In June of 1907 Mark Twain visited Marie Corelli and paid homage to her in a letter;⁵⁰ Ouida proudly declined her fellow novelist's offer to establish a fund for that impoverished and dying ex-patriot; one of her countless pamphlets--an indictment of the feminine movement--caused a significant furor; she undertook the restoration of Harvard House for Mr. and Mrs. Edward Morris of Chicago in order to establish a bond of friendship between Great Britain and America;⁵¹ and Ella Wheeler Wilcox greeted her by kneeling at her feet.⁵² By the end of 1909, however, Miss Corelli was despondent; she and Severn had parted, and the last ten chapters of Open Confession relate her altered emotions. First, she is childishly indignant:

All men strive to kill the divine in woman. Just as Joseph was "minded to put away" Mary of Nazareth, when she carried the God in her womb, so would all the Josephs of this world "put away" any woman who is pregnant with greater power than their own. But though you are a coward I am not one! I do not propose to stand weeping outside the shut door of a worthless love--a love which had no glory in it save that which I myself bestowed. I am free of bondage--and I shall never wear fetters again. Not for any man shall I forget my liberty of soul--and as you are the first man I ever loved,

⁵⁰Bigland, pp. 245-246.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 226-229.

⁵²Ibid., p. 255.

so will you be the last! I would not honour one of your sex again with so much as the lingering clasp of a hand! (Open Confession, pp. 102-103)

Then extravagantly pathetic in her pretensions to loneliness:

A world empty of love is a barren world!--a woman deprived of love is starved of the very essence of her life. Yes!--even though she may know, as I do, that the love men have to give is a transitory flash of passion only, which when imprisoned in the crucible of marriage frequently proves to be an insupportable flame, ready to quench itself at the lightest blow. Yet that "transitory flash" makes the sole light of many a woman's life! Strange mystery!--strange chance! Cruel destiny!

.....
 Women are never really happy in the possession of fame--they would rather clasp a little child to their bosoms than a wreath of laurels. The child may grow up to be a curse to the mother who bore it,--nevertheless she can seldom forget the first little cry, the first feeble caressing movement of its tiny hand. I, like most women, would have welcomed maternity as a blessing had it been my lot,--though not unless the deepest and most lasting love had brought the benediction. (Open Confession, pp. 160-161, 165)

For Marie Corelli was always to treat love as a spiritualizing force; it was a matter of elective affinities--of the meeting of soul-mates. Just as her love for Severn had been visionary, so too she consistently scorns the physical side of love in her novels; as a result, only the villains and villainesses of her books suffer the debilitating consequences of godless physical passions, and her married heroes and heroines rarely have children.

Thus, in spite of the obvious disappointment she felt at losing Severn, she could still, on the one hand, write rapturously over love in her romances, one of which, The Life Everlasting--a Rosicrucian-like work published in 1911 after she had locked Open Confession in her desk--is a

defiant hymn to ideal love. In the novel, the heroine hears a voice speaking to her in a vision:

"There is only one Way of Life,"--went on the Voice--
 "Only one way--the way of Love! Whosoever loves greatly
 lives greatly; whosoever misprizes Love is dead though
 living. Give all thy heart and soul to Love if thou
 wouldst be immortal!--for without Love thou mayst seek
 God through all Eternity and never find Him!"⁵³

On the other hand, the second book of Innocent called "His Fact" unites the imaginative novelist-heroine in a platonic affair with a mundane, egotistical painter who destroys her soul; and, in two of Miss Corelli's subsequent scientific adventures, The Young Diana (1918) and The Secret Power (1921), the woman of the future is depicted as beautiful and brilliant but incapable of ordinary earthly passions.

The rest of Marie Corelli's career is readily summarized. For twenty years she had been a best-selling novelist; and, while her sales were still high, her Victorian themes were easily outmoded by realism and the war. During the war, she gave unstintingly of her time and energy to bring about the victory of the Allied cause; and, to be sure, some of her dramatic denunciations of Germany and the Germans undoubtedly rival her earlier censures of the critics. She died on April 21, 1924. Convinced until the end that destiny would name Shakespeare her only rival in the literary history of England, she established a fund to preserve her home as a shrine for future generations of English and American readers to visit. In 1943,

⁵³Marie Corelli, The Life Everlasting (New York, 1911), p. 76.

however, when royalties from her works had fallen to a figure insufficient for its maintenance, the place was put up at auction. Today it is just Tudor House, a restaurant next to Garrick Inn and Harvard House on High Street in Stratford-upon-Avon.

A few years after Marie Corelli's death two of her more illustrious contemporaries wittily capsulized their disparagement of her. In her characterization of the Tosh-Horse--the best-seller's inspirational counterpart of Pegasus--Rebecca West obviously does not take Miss Corelli's work too seriously:

. . . the best-sellers have, like the toad, a jewel in the head; this jewel of demoniac vitality. Marie Corelli had a mind like any milliner's apprentice; but she was something more than a milliner's apprentice. When one turns over her pages one comes on delicious sentences. . . . Her incurably commonplace mind was incapable of inaccurately surveying life, but some wild lust for beauty in her made her take a wild inventory of the world's contents and try to do what it could with them. . . . She rode the Tosh-Horse at full gallop. . . .⁵⁴

And neither, as we might expect, does George Bernard Shaw attach much weight to the writing of a woman who had previously spoken of him as one of "our ape-like jesters of the press"--a man who has "mocked at all things holy, serious, and earnest. . . ."⁵⁵ He affirms:

⁵⁴Rebecca West, "The Tosh-Horse," The Strange Necessity (New York, 1928), p. 356.

⁵⁵Marie Corelli, "The Whirlwind," My Little Bit (New York, 1919), p. 50.

Marie Corelli's works are cheap victories of a profuse imagination over an apparently commonplace and carelessly cultivated mind.⁵⁶

But, for a moment, let us return to the enigma of Marie Corelli herself--that is did she take herself seriously? In the final analysis it probably does not matter so long as the reader can believe in the illusion which the novelist creates in her stories. As Walter Allen in his introduction to his critical history of the English novel notes:

Novelists have given many reasons for writing novels: Richardson believed he did so to inculcate right conduct, Fielding to reform the Manners of the age, Dickens to expose social evils, Trollope to make money by providing acceptable entertainment. The reasons were genuine enough but rationalizations after the event. Part of the impulse that drives the novelist to make his imitation world must always be sheer delight in his own skill in making; part of the time he is, as it were, taking the observed universe to pieces and assembling it again for the simple and naive pleasure of doing so.⁵⁷

What matters, then, is that Marie Corelli's was a considerable talent--an undisciplined, often misused, minor talent, if you will, but a talent, nevertheless--one that enables the reader to observe her fantastic "imitation world" with at least imperfect belief. Yet, after all, as Walter Allen once more reminds us, the student of English literature must not solely concern himself with major works, "responding to the quality of life

⁵⁶George Bernard Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays (New York, 1928), I, xviii.

⁵⁷Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (New York, 1955), p. xvii.

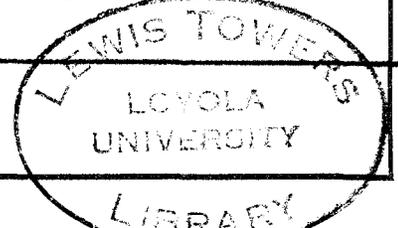
in them that makes them living forces not only for modern readers but also modern writers," but must seek, in addition, to understand "why works that seem secondary to us were important in their own day, both in their own right and as transmitting genes of development to the future."⁵⁸ At the same time, however, the tone of moral sincerity which Miss Corelli affected in her life and writing would lead us to assume that she came to accept her "imitation world" as a way of life. Writing in her very first novel, A Romance of Two Worlds, published in 1886, she grandly observes:

It is to those who feel the quick stirrings of a larger, grander life within them--who realize with love and eagerness the wonders of the world to come, and who gaze appealingly across the darkness of present things, striving to see, no matter how distantly, the first faint glimmer of the brightness beyond the grave--to these I speak, inadequately and feebly I know, yet with all my soul desiring to cheer them, as they climb from steep to steep of high thought and noble endeavour, onward and upward. (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 4)

And in the "Prologue" to The Life Everlasting, one of her late novels, published in 1911, she could still stoutly maintain:

I must now claim the indulgence of those among my readers who possess the rare gift of patience, for anything that may seem too personal in the following statement which I feel it almost necessary to make on the subject of my own 'psychic' creed. I am so often asked if I believe this or that, if I am 'orthodox,' if I am a sceptic, materialist or agnostic, that I should like, if possible, to make things clear between myself and these enquirers. Therefore I may say at once that my belief in God and the immortality of the Soul is absolute,--but that I did not attain to the faith I hold without hard training and bitter suffering. This need not be dwelt upon, being

⁵⁸Ibid., p. xxiii.



past. I began to write when I was too young to know anything of the world's worldly ways, and when I was too enthusiastic and too much carried away by the splendour and beauty of the spiritual ideal to realise the inevitable derision and scorn which are bound to fall upon untried explorers into the mysteries of the unseen; yet it was solely on account of a strange psychical experience which chanced to myself when I stood upon the threshold of what is called 'life' that I found myself producing my first book, "A Romance of Two Worlds." It was a rash experiment, but it was the direct result of an initiation into some few of the truths behind the veil of the Seeming Real. (The Life Everlasting, pp. 16-17)

Even the severest critics of Miss Corelli's works are quick to concede that, unlike most slick best-sellers, her stories can be recognized by "the passionate conviction with which they are written."⁵⁹

Including her first novel, A Romance of Two Worlds, and The Life Everlasting, Miss Corelli tells us that she wrote seven religious, pseudo-scientific works "in the guise" of romance "to serve as a little lamp of love whereby my readers might haply discover the real character of the obstacle which blocked their way to an intelligent Soul-advancement" (The Life Everlasting, p. 22). The other five novels comprise in the order of their publication: Ardath (1889), The Soul of Lilith (1892), Barabbas (1893), The Sorrows of Satan (1895), and The Master Christian (1900). To these seven prophetic novels we might add three more: one, Ziska (1897), a negligible effort, was composed early in the author's career; whereas the other two, The Young Diana (1918) and The Secret Power (1921), are

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Leonard Woolf, "The World of Books: The Bestseller," Nation & The Athenaeum, XXXVI (March 7, 1925), 777.

futuristic romances emphasizing science more than religion and post-dating the "Prologue" to The Life Everlasting. During the period in which these ten novels were published, Miss Corelli wrote some further dozen sensation novels and social satires in order, as she protests, to please her public and her publishers, who desired a variety (The Life Everlasting, pp. 22-23).⁶⁰

⁶⁰The novels and stories of Marie Corelli in the order of their dates of publication include:

- A Romance of Two Worlds. 2 vols. London, 1886.
Vendetta, or The Story of One Forgotten. 3 vols. London, 1886.
Thelma: A Norwegian Princess. 3 vols. London, 1887.
Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self. 3 vols. London, 1889.
My Wonderful Wife: A Study in Smoke. London, 1889.
Wormwood: A Drama of Paris. 3 vols. London, 1890.
The Soul of Lilith. 3 vols. London, 1892.
Barabbas: A Dream of the World's Tragedy. 3 vols. London, 1893.
The Sorrows of Satan, or The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire. London, 1895.
The Murder of Delicia. London, 1896.
The Mighty Atom. London, 1896.
Cameos. London, 1896.
Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul. London, 1897.
Jane: A Social Incident. London, 1897.
Boy: A Sketch. London, 1900.
The Master Christian. London, 1900.
Temporal Power: A Study in Supremacy. London, 1902.
God's Good Man: A Simple Love Story. London, 1904.
The Strange Visitation. London, 1904.
The Treasure of Heaven: A Romance of Riches. London, 1906.
Holy Orders: The Tragedy of a Quiet Life. London, 1908.
The Life Everlasting: A Reality of Romance. London, 1911.
Innocent: Her Fancy and His Fact. London, 1914.
The Young Diana: An Experiment of the Future. London, 1918.
The Love of Long Ago and Other Stories. London, 1920.
The Secret Power. London, 1921.
Love,--And the Philosopher: A Study in Sentiment. London, 1923.
Open Confession: To a Man from a Woman. London, 1925.

As we will later discover, none of the ideas that Marie Corelli advances in her psychic novels are original--all of them are derived from the English and German romantic poets; from the early and late romantic novelists; and particularly from the Rosicrucians, who also influenced some of the other romantic writers. While her eclectic philosophy almost defies epitomization, a general knowledge of Miss Corelli's religious beliefs is necessary for an understanding of her novels. Since, moreover, she reveals only small areas of her religious credo in each of her romances, the prophetic novels should be read in sequence, and a summary acquaintance with their ideas will enable us eventually to describe with greater freedom the themes of these works, as well as those of the other novels. Accordingly, Miss Corelli, rather too confidently, delineates the God of her electric creed:

He is a Shape of pure Electric Radiance. Those who may be inclined to doubt this may search the Scriptures on which they pin their faith, and they will find that all the visions and appearances of the Deity there chronicled were electric in character.

As a poet forms poems, or a musician melodies, so God formed by a Thought the Vast Central Sphere in which He dwells, and peopled it with the pure creations of His glorious fancy. And why? Because, being pure Light, He is also pure Love; the power or capacity of Love implies the necessity of Loving; the necessity of loving points to the existence of things to be loved--hence the secret of creation. From the ever-working Intelligence of this Divine Love, proceeded the Electric Circle of the Universe, from whence are born all worlds. (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 222)

Of Christ she asserts:

It was necessary, in order to establish what has been called an electric communication between God's sphere and this Earth, that an actual immortal, untainted Spirit in the person of Christ should walk this world, sharing with men sufferings, difficulties, danger, and death. Why? In order that we might first completely confide in and trust Him, afterwards realizing His Spiritual strength and glory by His resurrection. And here may be noted the main difference between the Electric Theory of Christianity and other theories. Christ did not die because God needed a sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice is a relic of heathen barbarism; God is too infinitely loving to desire the sacrifice of the smallest flower. He is too patient to be ever wrathful; and barbaric ignorance confronts us again in the notion that He should need to be appeased. And the fancy that He should desire Himself or part of Himself to become a sacrifice to Himself has arisen out of the absurd and conflicting opinions of erring humanity, wherein right and wrong are so jumbled together that is [sic] difficult to distinguish one from the other. Christ's death was not a sacrifice; it was simply a means of confidence and communion with the Creator. A sinless Spirit suffered to show us how to suffer; lived on earth to show us how to live; prayed to show us how to pray; died to show us how to die; rose again to impress strongly upon us that there was in truth a life beyond this one, for which He strove to prepare our souls. Finally, by His re-ascension into Heaven He established that much needed electric communication between us and the Central Sphere. (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 227)

After the garish metaphor in which Miss Corelli equates Christ with an electric cable laid between heaven and us (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 225), the rest of her statements concerning her faith seem relatively unimaginative. Like that of the Rosicrucians, her creed embraces a belief in a cyclic history in which the deathless souls of men undergo continuous reincarnation until they are purified. In fact, like the souls of men, the diabolic spirits must also pass through a period of purgation in order to achieve salvation. Satan himself actually seeks salvation through his constant temptation of men, since it is only through the repudiation of such

temptation that man, and especially women, empower Lucifer to soar closer to God. On the one hand, Miss Corelli disapproves of priestcraft and theological systems because she claims that the Christian religions are founded upon St. Peter, who was a liar, and St. Paul, who perverted the true teachings of Christ. Thus, in Barabbas, St. Peter is represented as a heartless weakling, who is warned by the seer Melchior that the "fatal clinging of thy soul to things temporal shall warp thy way for ever and taint thy mission";⁶¹ even as St. Paul is vilified in a number of the religious novels, including the following passage spoken by the post-hero of Ardath:

"It was St. Paul's preaching that upset all the beautiful, pristine simplicity of the faith; it is very evident he had no 'calling of election' such as he pretended. I wonder Jeremy Bentham's conclusive book on the subject is not more universally known. Paul's sermonizing gave rise to a thousand different shades of opinion and argument, and, for a mere hair's-breadth of needless discussion, nation has fought against nation, and man against man, till the very name of religion has been made a ghastly mockery. That, however, is not the fault of Christianity, but the fault of those who profess to follow it, like Paul, while merely following a scheme of their own personal advantage or convenience; and the result of it all is that at this very moment there is not a church in Christendom where Christ's actual commands are really and to the letter fulfilled."⁶²

As we might expect, just as Miss Corelli opposed sectarianism in her life, so too the glorified Christians of her novels refuse to attend any church;

⁶¹Marie Corelli, Barabbas (Philadelphia, 1901), p. 217.

⁶²Marie Corelli, Ardath (New York, n. d.), pp. 452-453.

even the Christian marriage ceremony is eschewed by the heroes and heroines of the prophetic novels who marry each other without benefit of clergy. On the other hand, of the existing Christian denominations, Miss Corelli eventually came to prefer the simple fundamentalist sects, which, she felt, were closest to the purity of Christ's teaching; High Church, and particularly "Romish" Church, practices she condemns as paganistic.

CHAPTER II

THE NOVELS OF MARIE CORELLI IN RELATION TO THE VICTORIAN AGE

If, as has been suggested, the literary history of the 'eighties and 'nineties is the story of art's struggle against prudery and respectability,¹ and if this struggle can be simply characterized in fiction as a split between the old and the new, then Marie Corelli's novels, while retaining unmistakable evidences of realism--even naturalism of the most sordid kind--still belong primarily to the older school of romantic fiction as typified by the Brontë sisters, the first Baron Lytton, Dickens, Collins, and Reade. Like these greater Victorians, she also can be said to have inherited the prophetic fervor from the romantic poets who placed a high premium upon the imagination as the key to art. It was quite fitting, therefore, that her first lecture, delivered in November, 1901, before an audience numbering some four thousand of the members and friends of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, should have been entitled "The Vanishing Gift: An Address on the Decay of the Imagination." In the true romantic tradition, this defense is distinguished by its emphasis on the imagination as a power of prophecy, for the imagination "is always ahead of Science, pointing out in advance the

¹Malcolm Elwin, Old Gods Falling (New York, 1939), p. 35.

great discovery to come"; and by its designation of the imagination as a moral force "which builds up grand ideals of life and love and immortality"-- ideals which are in glaring contrast with the actions of the irreverent, unchivalrous "spasmodic motor man-animal" and the "smoking, slangy horsey, betting, woman-animal. . . ." ²

Her own outrageously bold imagination allowed Marie Corelli to embellish her novels with the tarnished themes of a fading romanticism, yet to maintain at least the semblance of originality, which was undoubtedly a major factor in her widespread appeal. As Walter C. Phillips has illustrated in his study of the Victorian sensation novelists, their melodramatic creed necessitated constant experimentation. ³ Such experimentation on the part of Miss Corelli is evidenced by a list of the types of novels that she wrote; there is the religious, pseudo-scientific novel, the scientific romance, the religious-historical novel, the religious novel, the novel of purpose, the Gothic romance, and the satiric novel of high society. But the divisions always overlap, and it is a breathtaking experience to attempt to relate the motifs of even a single novel. In enumerating the ideas of her very first novel, for example, one disparaging critic labels it "an extraordinary mystical

²Marie Corelli, "The Vanishing Gift," Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct (London, 1905), pp. 273-291.

³Walter C. Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins, Sensation Novelists: A Study in the Conditions and Theories of Novel Writing in Victorian England (New York, 1962), p. 183.

farrago of spiritualism, pseudo-science, mesmerism, social reform, evangelistic religion, angelology, amateur psychology, cosmogony, and physical therapy."⁴

Marie Corelli furnishes us with another reason for her popularity insofar as she is like Charlotte Brontë⁶ in her ability to juxtapose high romance and stern realism--and Miss Corelli's sort of romance is never out of line with current events. Even as one of her preoccupations is with the occult, so too she serves up the occult in a new and tasty dish guaranteed to please in an age in which "visionaries and mystics such as Swedenborg, Buddha and Madame Blavatsky, the spiritualist celebrity, all became fashionable teachers, while theosophical societies, psychical research and 'miracle clubs' (often imported from America) flourished abundantly, as those who felt that Christianity was almost bankrupt turned eagerly to the study of Eastern philosophies and to the exploration of occult forces of all kinds."⁵ Like Bulwer-Lytton in Zicci, Zanoni, A Strange Story, and The Coming Race, however, Miss Corelli supposes in her novels that natural science may include psychic phenomena now thought of as occult. Moreover, unlike many of the occult enthusiasts of the nineteenth-century, Marie Corelli was avowedly Christian; and her stories blend the human and the divine, the seen and the unseen, in a manner which provided not only entertainment but a genuine help to many people

⁴Frank Luther Mott, p. 178.

⁵Maison, p. 326.

who were groping after a lost Christianity.⁶

The occult strain in Miss Corelli's prophetic novels manifests itself in a growing concern with Rosicrucian thought--a fact, as we have already noted, that seems to have puzzled her biographers. In addition, as we will otherwise have cause to observe, she slavishly illustrates, with one outstanding exception, all of the basic tenets of Rosicrucianism in her novels, and is, therefore, one of a handful of successors of William Godwin, who introduced Rosicrucian themes into his St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century--a dull, labored work combining the mysteries of the occult with a gospel of domesticity intended to modify the reformer's earlier disapproving views on the private affections in Political Justice.⁷ Published in 1799, St. Leon treats romantic motifs, such as the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life, in an unromantic fashion, since, as we might expect, Godwin is more interested in developing the message of his book--that domestic happiness should not be despised by a man of reason--than he is in portraying an atmosphere of supernatural terror.

By way of contrast, Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of Godwin's disciples, was in his youth very much preoccupied with the Gothic and supernatural; and his "fiendmongering" resulted in two boyish experiments in the novel of

⁶Ibid., p. 337.

⁷Edith Birkhead, The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance (New York, 1963), pp. 111-112.

terror--Zastrozzi, published in 1810, which indicates the influence of Charlotte Dacre's Zofloya or the Moor (1806), and St. Irvyne; or The Rosicrucian, published in 1811, which denotes the influences of both Zofloya and St. Leon.⁸ As the title of St. Irvyne suggests, the work supposedly has some connection with Rosicrucian lore. Like St. Leon, however, this connection is a rather tenuous one; in fact, in a letter of November 19, 1810, addressed to his harassed publisher J. J. Stockdale, who had insisted that Shelley explain to him the confused conclusion of his two-plot Rosicrucian romance, the young "gentleman of the University of Oxford" confesses that

What I mean as Rosicrucian is the elixir of eternal life. . . . Mr. Godwin's romance of St. Leon turns upon that superstition; I enveloped it in a mystery for the greater excitement of interest. . . .⁹

Shelley utilizes the name of the Rosicrucian society, then, primarily as an aid in his attempt to conjure up all of the horrors of a typical Gothic setting. Despite pages of frightful landscape painting and a rush of melodramatic incidents, his obvious endeavors to shock are not likely to be taken too seriously by the average reader. For example, in Zastrozzi the

⁸Ibid., p. 122.

⁹Letter from Percy Bysshe Shelley, November 19, 1810, cited by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (eds.), in The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (London, 1928), V, 298.

victim of the malevolent Zastrozzi, after enduring countless days and nights in a dungeon with slimy lizards and "large earth-worms, which twined themselves in his long and matted hair," is described at one point as seized by "a frigorific torpidity of despair. . . ."10 Similarly, the heroine of St. Irvyne expires "weltering in purple gore," while the hero, repentant of evils too numerous to detail here, finally thrusts off the power of the infernal Rosicrucian, whose terrible eyes constantly flash with "coruscations of inexpressible fire. . . ."11 Both die--the hero "blackened in terrible convulsions"; and the villain "mouldered to a gigantic skeleton" with two "pale and ghastly flames" glaring "in his eyeless sockets."12

If the Rosicrucian elixir of life is about as close as Godwin and Shelley ever get to exploring the mysteries of that mystical society, there can be no doubt about the authentic Rosicrucian touches in the novels of a near contemporary of Miss Corelli, Lord Bulwer-Lytton. A Rosicrucian himself, Bulwer-Lytton seems to have manifested a genuine predilection for the occult--a predilection which was "neither a theatrical pose nor a passing folly excited by the fashionable craze for psychical research" but one, "inherited, it may be, from his ancestor, the learned, eccentric savant, Dr. Bulwer, who

10Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Zastrozzi," Ibid., V, 7, 84.

11Percy Bysshe Shelley, "St. Irvyne," Ibid., V, 152, 142.

12Ibid., p. 199.

studied the Black Art and dabbled in astrology and palmistry."¹³ Like his ancestor, Lord Lytton is described as a man who was "adept in magic, astrology, palmistry, and the rest of the black arts."¹⁴ We are told, furthermore, that he "kept watch in haunted chambers, and no doubt experienced, dreaming or waking, all the ghastly sensations which he succeeds in making so actual."¹⁵ Of his various supernatural and scientific tales, two--Zanoni (1842) and A Strange Story (1861)--undoubtedly represent his most complete excursions into Rosicrucian thought. Although the latter of these works, A Strange Story, is a romance of much less consequence than Zanoni, it does succeed in combining a number of motifs that we later find Miss Corelli also using in her prophetic novels. Thus, besides the elixir of life motif, A Strange Story hints at the possibility of reincarnation, depicts a Rosicrucian world of spirits, and introduces electricity as a vital principle--an idea developed at greater length in Lytton's utopian The Coming Race (1871). Bulwer-Lytton judged, however, that his earlier, symbolical, Rosicrucian romance Zanoni, which was based on Zicci, a sketch published in 1838, was his greatest work. The plot, which is long and complicated, treats of the five-thousand year old Chaldean Zanoni who,

¹³Birkhead, pp. 178-179.

¹⁴Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray (New York, 1936), VII, 193.

¹⁵Ibid.

having exchanged human emotions for eternal life, at last comes to love an Italian opera singer and to give his life for her during the French Revolution. Zanoni possesses the powers of healing, reading the mind, predicting the future, and conversing with good and evil spirits. One spirit, Adon-Ai typifies faith; whereas another, the dreadful Dweller of the Threshold, embodies the horror which haunts anyone who fails in his attempt to pass the barrier into the unexplained regions of nature. Here The Dweller of the Threshold confronts the bold Clarence Glyndon, who, in his rash summoning of the demon, signifies the unsustained aspiration which is the mirror of young manhood:

By degrees, this object shaped itself to his sight. It was as that of a human head, covered with a dark veil, through which glared, with livid and demoniac fire, eyes that froze the marrow of his bones. Nothing else of the face was distinguishable--nothing but those intolerable eyes; but his terror, that even at the first seemed beyond nature to endure, was increased a thousandfold, when, after a pause, the Phantom glided slowly into the chamber. The cloud retreated from it as it advanced; the bright lamps grew wan, and flickered restlessly as at the breath of its presence. Its form was veiled as the face, but the outline was that of a female; yet it moved not as move even the ghosts that simulate the living. It seemed rather to crawl as some vast misshapen reptile; and pausing, at the [sic] length it covered beside the table which held the mystic volume, and again fixed its eyes through the filmy veil on the rash invoker.¹⁶

If this scene did not include a significantly Gothic stress on the Familiar's fiery eyes, it could almost duplicate several passages in Miss Corelli's

¹⁶Edward Bulwer Lytton, Zanoni (New York, 1901), p. 280.

The Life Everlasting, where spirits of good and evil appear and disappear as matters of everyday occurrence; and where, like Clarence Glyndon in Zanoni, the heroine must endure a test before she can enter fully into a life beyond this life. Moreover, the mysterious Chaldean ancestry of Zanoni is paralleled in Miss Corelli's Chaldean monks--the monks of the star and the cross--who possess all of the powers of Zanoni.

The Rosicrucian elements in A Strange Story and Zanoni represent only one of the many Gothic influences evidenced by Bulwer-Lytton's supernatural tales. Insofar as Lytton looks back to the eighteenth-century in his revival of the Gothic romance and the novel of social reform, he may, indeed be termed the successor of both Mrs. Radcliffe and William Godwin.¹⁷ With the romantic poets and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Sir Walter Scott, Lytton has, in turn, been named by more than one literary historian a major influence on the development of the sensational novel of Dickens, Collins, and Reade. Thus, Walter C. Phillips traces their work back through Bulwer-Lytton to Godwin and Mrs. Radcliffe, noting in particular the emergence and development of the Byronic hero in the fiction of Mrs. Radcliffe, his refinement in the poetry of Byron, his moral regeneration and degeneration again in Bulwer-Lytton's romances of crime, and his final complete deterioration in the sensation novels of Dickens's school, as exemplified by Oliver Twist and Barnaby Rudge. Phillips summarizes the evolution of

¹⁷Robert Morss Lovett and Helen Sard Hughes, The History of the Novel in England (Boston, 1932), pp. 207-208.

the Byronic hero early in his discussion:

From the end of the eighteenth century, when makers of fiction followed the direction of Walpole's revolt, and adopted the appeal to fear as a primary motive, some of the best powers of invention for the next six or seven decades were devoted chiefly to the elaboration of a terrible protagonist, half human, half demoniac. The terror that he inspired was the direct measure of his success. As in all revolt the first manifestations were most violent, and its results are least credible as reflections of conceivable human experience; the favorite figure of such romances was originally supernatural or else was brought into direct encounter with supernatural forces; then, like Lara and the early heroes of Bulwer-Lytton, a frankly human being of ambiguous moral nature, partly admirable, mostly vicious; and finally the stereotyped villain of melodramatic stage and shilling shocker.¹⁸

Contrasting with the questionable morality of the usual Byronic hero, however, the Rosicrucian novels of Lord Lytton display the hero, like Zanoni, contacting supernatural powers, while remaining an essentially moral character who utilizes his occult secrets to benefit mankind. One of many writers to follow in the way of Bulwer-Lytton, Marie Corelli is a late and lesser exponent of the sensation school. Although, as we will demonstrate later, there are other influences manifest in her wide variety of novels, she owes her melodramatic devices and her tendency to over-write primarily to the Gothic tradition as transmitted by Bulwer-Lytton and Charles Dickens. Nevertheless, since her central characters are frequently women or male types--sometimes of the muscular Christian variety--derived from the

¹⁸Phillips, p. 6.

religious novels of the period, instances of the Byronic hero or one of his transformed descendants appearing in her novels are few. And, when the Byronic hero is portrayed, he is a reversion to the earlier figure of mysterious, sentimental villainy--a Manfred rather than a Paul Clifford or Fagin. Hence, the fiery-eyed protagonist of The Soul of Lilith (1892), who is of Oriental ancestry and possesses extraordinary psychic and scientific powers, refuses to bend his pride to a belief in God and is driven mad. Since throughout the novel Miss Corelli equates him with Hamlet, it is only fitting that we first meet him at a performance of Hamlet:

His skin was dark as a mulatto's,--yet smooth, and healthily coloured by the warm blood flushing through the olive tint,--his eyes seemed black, but could scarcely be seen on account of the extreme length and thickness of their dark lashes,--the fine, rather scornful curve of his short upper lip was partially hidden by a black moustache; and with all this blackness and darkness about his face his hair, of which he seemed to have an extraordinary profusion, was perfectly white. Not merely a silvery white, but a white as pronounced as that of a bit of washed fleece or newly-fallen snow. In looking at him it was impossible to decide whether he was old or young,--because, though he carried no wrinkles or other defacing marks of Time's power to destroy his features wore an impress of such stern and deeply-resolved thought as is seldom or never the heritage of those to whom youth still belongs.¹⁹

Another Byronic hero from a prophetic novel, The Sorrows of Satan (1895), although the devil himself, is, like Milton's Satan, anything but a stereotyped malignity. Instead, he is a tragic figure whose sorrows are

¹⁹Marie Corelli, The Soul of Lilith (London, 1918), p. 3.

nobly borne and whose virtues are evident even to the singularly stupid protagonist:

I am myself an average good height, but he was fully half a head taller than I, if not more than that,--and as I looked straightly at him, I thought I had never seen so much beauty and intellectuality combined in the outward personality of any human being. The finely shaped head denoted both power and wisdom, and was nobly poised on such shoulders as might have befitted a Hercules,--the countenance was a pure oval, and singularly pale, this complexion intensifying the almost fiery brilliancy of the full dark eyes, which had in them a curious and wonderfully attractive look of mingled mirth and misery. The mouth was perhaps the most telling feature in this remarkable face,--set in the perfect curve of beauty, it was yet firm, determined, and not too small, thus escaping effeminacy,--and I noted that in repose it expressed bitterness, disdain and even cruelty. But with the light of a smile upon it, it signified, or seemed to signify, something more subtle than any passion to which we can give a name, and already with the rapidity of a lightning flash, I caught myself wondering what that mystic undeclared something might be.²⁰

Ziska (1897) is the last of the prophetic novels to employ a dark, mysterious hero; but he is hardly worth noticing, since he is completely over-shadowed by the passionate Gothic villainess--a favorite character of Miss Corelli--who precipitates a series of wildly melodramatic events that defy acceptance even in a Marie Corelli setting.

Of course, the sensation novelists owe more than a single character to the Gothic tradition. W. C. Phillips indicates that the sensation novels are further characterized by strong emotion, unusual incident, and dramatic

²⁰Marie Corelli, The Sorrows of Satan (Philadelphia, 1896), p. 23.

method.²¹ In Bleak House alone, which Ernest A. Baker has called the most Gothic of nineteenth-century romances,²² Phillips catalogues nine instances of grotesque and violent death; and, while we doubt that Miss Corelli has equalled in any of her novels the spontaneous combustion death of Krook, some of the singular and often horrifying events, especially the many appalling death scenes, which mark all of her stories but a few slight society novels, readily suggest that she was as inventive as any of the Victorian novelists who wrote in the romantic tradition. Spectral, prophetic dreams haunt the characters of the spiritualistic romances; and violent confrontations extend for page after page until Miss Corelli has drained every drop of emotion from the scene. Here, for example, after repeatedly vowing her love for her husband's best friend, the devil, while the husband, naturally, observes from hiding, the spurned Gothic villainess expresses her terrible desperation:

"You repulse me,--you scorn me!" she muttered in hurried fierce accents that scarcely rose above an angry whisper. "You make a mockery of my heart's anguish and despair, but you shall suffer for it! I am your match,--nay your equal! You shall not spurn me a second time. You ask, will I love you when I know who you are,--it is your pleasure to deal in mysteries, but I have no mysteries-- I am a woman who loves you with all the passion of a life,-- and I will murder myself and you, rather than live to know that I have prayed you for your love in vain. Do you think

²¹ Phillips, p. 12.

²² Baker, VII, p. 294.

I came unprepared?--no!" and she suddenly drew from her bosom a short steel dagger with a jewelled hilt, a curio I recognized as one of the gifts to her on her marriage. "Love me, I say!--or I will stab myself dead here at your feet. . . ." (The Sorrows of Satan, pp. 355-356)

Needless to say, this faithless wife lives long enough to endure a more lingering death by a very slow-acting poison. As she is dying, moreover, she has sufficient time to write a lengthy memoir of her life and to describe in grisly detail the hideous ravages of the poison. But deaths by poisoning, stabbing, and shooting are commonplace in these novels; and Miss Corelli often finds more exciting methods of disposing of her characters. In A Romance of Two Worlds (1886) an electrically charged beauty allows herself to be killed by a bolt of lightning; whereas in Thelma (1887) a prophetic dwarf hurls himself from a rock into a thundering cataract--the supposed site of his death was long a tourist attraction--and a modern day Viking goes to Valhalla in his flaming ship. Ardath (1889) likewise relates a number of catastrophes, including the destruction of an entire city in a volcanic eruption, and the graphic death of the evil high priestess who is strangled by her own python in the flames. It is also in Ardath--a veritable thunderstorm of violent emotions and violent deaths--that the hero encounters a classic example of the Gothic chamber of horrors:

He went down slowly and cautiously, counting each step as he placed his foot upon it. There were a hundred steps in all, and at the end the light he had seen completely vanished, leaving him in the most profound darkness. Confused and startled, he stretched out his hands instinctively as a blind man might do, and thus came in contact with something sharp, pointed, and icy cold like the frozen talon of a dead bird. Shuddering at the touch, he recoiled, and was about to try and grope his way up the

stairs again, when the light once more appeared, this time casting a thin, slanting, azure blaze through the dense shadows, and he was able gradually to realize the horrors of the place into which he had unwittingly adventured. One faint cry escaped his lips, and then he was mute and motionless, chilled to the very heart. A great awe and speechless dread overwhelmed him, for he, a living man and fully conscious of life, stood alone, surrounded by a ghastly multitude of skeletons--skeletons bleached white as ivory and glistening with a smooth, moist polish of pearl. Shoulder to shoulder, arm against arm, they stood, placed upright, and as close together as possible. Every bony hand held a rusty spear, and on every skull gleamed a small metal casque inscribed with hieroglyphic characters. Thousands of eyeless sockets seemed to turn toward him in blank yet questioning wonder, suggesting awfully to his mind that the eyes might still be there, fallen far back into the head from whence they yet saw, themselves unseen; thousands of grinning jaws seemed to mock at him, as he leaned half fainting against the damp weed-grown portal; he fancied he could hear the derisive laugh of death echoing horribly through those dimly distant arches. (Ardath, p. 249)

Perhaps three of Miss Corelli's strangest scenes occur in The Mighty Atom (1896), in which the precocious, but perplexed, young hero hangs himself in his baby sash; in Ziska (1897), in which the hero dies of some supernatural force while he is buried alive in an Egyptian tomb; and in The Master Christian (1900)--remarkable for its startling revelations, its vicious clergymen, and its supernatural interventions--in which one of the many villains dies in a flaming monastery while "an ecclesiastical Nero" plays the organ.²³

²³See Henry Murray, "Miss Marie Corelli," Robert Buchanan: A Critical Appreciation and Other Essays (London, 1901), pp. 215-229.

. . . the air rushing through the door and meeting with that already blowing through the window raised a perfect pyramid of flame which rose straight up and completely encircled the organ. With a frightful cry Varillo rushed to Ambrosio's side, and cowering down, clung to his garments.

"Oh, God!--Oh, God! Have mercy!--"

"He will have mercy!" said Ambrosio, still keeping his hands on the organ-keys and drawing out strange plaintive chords of solemn harmony--"He will have mercy--be sure of it! Ambrosio will ask Him to be merciful!--Ambrosio has saved you from crime worse than death,--Ambrosio has cleansed you by fire! Ambrosio will help you to find God in the darkness!"

Smoke and flame encircled them,--for one moment more their figures were seen like black specks in the wreathing columns of fire--for one moment more the music of the organ thundered through the chapel,--then came a terrific crash--a roar of the victorious flames as they sprang up high to the roof of the building, and then--then nothing but a crimson glare on the Campagna, seen for miles and miles around, and afterwards described to the world by the world's press as the "Burning Down of a Trappist Monastery" in which no lives had been lost save those of one Fra Ambrosio, long insane, who was supposed to have kindled the destructive blaze in a fit of mania,--and of a stranger, sick of malarial fever, whom the monks had sheltered, name unknown.²⁴

The novel which succeeded The Master Christian and which almost matches it in its lavish use of melodramatic devices is Temporal Power (1902), the denouement of which finds a gallant king dying in the middle of "warring waters" and a "seething whirlpool of waves" on board the burial ship of his murdered beloved with her murderer.²⁵ But Marie Corelli's originality was

²⁴Marie Corelli, The Master Christian (New York, 1900), p. 546.

²⁵Marie Corelli, Temporal Power (New York, 1902), p. 556.

to persist even into her later novels. Indeed, the most astounding end of all is suffered by the adventuress in Holy Orders (1908), who, after crushing her drunken lover beneath the wheels of her automobile, sails off in a balloon with its drunken society pilot. And, when the drunken pilot has a heart attack, the adventuress is left alone in the dipping, soaring balloon until at dawn she and the balloon sink into the sea.

Two of Miss Corelli's most spectacular early novels are modern Gothic romances. Thus, Vendetta! (1886) was written according to the novelist in order to please her public and her publisher; while Wormwood (1890), a sordid tale of Parisian low life which even Miss Corelli conceded is sensational, is defended by her on the basis of its moral purpose.²⁶ In Vendetta! an Italian Count awakens from an attack of cholera to discover that he has been buried alive. His struggles to get out of the hastily prepared coffin and then to effect his escape from the family vault are vividly delineated. At one point, just after the Count has burst through the coffin and fallen asleep from illness and exhaustion, he is aroused by a new terror--one that recalls the dungeon alarms of Agnes de Medina in The Monk:

I must have slumbered for some time, when I was suddenly awakened by a suffocating sensation of faintness and nausea, accompanied by a sharp pain on my neck as though some creatures were stinging me. I put my hand up to the place--God! shall I ever forget the feel of the Thing my trembling fingers closed upon! It was fastened

²⁶See the "Prologue" to Miss Corelli's The Life Everlasting, pp. 22-23 and the "Introductory Note" to her Wormwood (New York, n. d.), pp. v-vii.

in my flesh--a winged, clammy, breathing horror! It clung to me with a loathly persistency that nearly drove me frantic, and wild with disgust and terror I screamed aloud! I closed both hands convulsively upon its fat, soft body-- I literally tore it from my flesh and flung it as far back as I could into the interior blackness of the vault.²⁷

But the Count escapes from the vault only to discover that his wife and best friend are mourning his death in loving embrace, and he contrives a complicated plot of slow vengeance. His plan eventually leads to his coming back to his own estate in disguise to woo his own wife, unknown to his rival, the best friend, who hopes to win her for himself. At a suspenseful banquet attended by thirteen guests, the Count finally announces his proposed marriage and thus brings down upon himself the challenge of his former friend, whom he promptly kills in a duel. The climax of the novel occurs on the wedding night of the Count and his wife. Under the pretext of disclosing to her the source of his vast wealth, the Count takes his wife to the family vault to reveal himself to her and then to abandon her in the locked chamber. Fate intervenes, however, and the Countess, now quite mad, is buried as the result of a storm or earthquake.

An enormous block of stone, dislodged by the violence of the storm, had fallen from the roof of the vault; fallen sheer down over the very place where she had sat a minute or two before, fantastically smiling! Crushed under the huge mass--crushed into the very splinters of my own empty coffin, she lay--and yet--and yet--I could see nothing, save one white hand protruding--the hand on which the marriage-ring glittered mockingly! Even as I looked, that

²⁷Marie Corelli, Vendetta! (Chicago, n. d.), p. 24.

hand quivered violently--beat the ground--and then--was still! It was horrible. In dreams I see that quivering white hand now, the jewels on it sparkling with derisive luster. It appeals, it calls, it threatens, it prays! and when my time comes to die, it will beckon me to my grave! A portion of her costly dress was visible--my eyes lighted on this--and I saw a slow stream of blood oozing thickly from beneath the stone--the ponderous stone that no man could have moved an inch--the stone that sealed her awful sepulcher! Great Heaven! how fast the crimson stream of life trickled!--staining the snowy lace of her garment with a dark and dreadful hue! (Vendetta!, p. 335)

If a certain restrained irony in the treatment of Vendetta! makes it one of Miss Corelli's most convincing ventures in the art of pure story-telling, Wormwood, on the contrary, succeeds by its very lack of discipline--by its relentless juxtaposition of scene after scene of Parisian low life, criminal brutality, and nightmarish futility, all sifted through the hallucinatory vision of its absinthe-sodden protagonist. Hence, the protagonist of Wormwood takes his deliberate plunge into the maelstrom of madness by enslaving himself to absinthe, which deprives him of every vestige of humanity. On their wedding day, he denounces as faithless the woman he thinks he loves, ruining her and her family; and later strangles his rival in love, a priest, hurling his body into the river. When he and an artist, Gessonex, visit the morgue for amusement, they find the body of the priest:

The sight was so ghastly that for a moment the careless Gessonex himself was startled,--while I,--I staggered backward slightly, overcome by a reeling sense of nausea. Ugh!--those blue, swollen, contorted limbs!--It had been impossible to straighten them, so said the imperturbable M. Jéteaux,--in fact a "toilette" for this twisted personage had been completely beyond the skill of the valéts of the Morgue. I mastered the sick fear and

abhorrence that threatened to unsteady my nerves,--and came up, out of sheer bravado, as closely as I could to the detestable thing,--I saw its face, all horribly distended,--its blue lips which were parted widely in a sort of ferocious smile,--its great protruding eyes,--God!--I could hardly save myself from uttering a shriek as the man Jéteaux, desirous of being civil to Gessonex, lifted the unnaturally swollen head into an upright position, and those stony yet wet-glistening eyes stared vacantly at me out of their purple sockets! I knew them! (Wormwood, p. 212)

Within the next few sordid chapters, the narrator encounters the woman he once denounced and mercilessly taunts her with the news of the death of her former lover until she drowns herself in the river.

. . . she raised her hands to heaven and clasped them as though in supplication,--then--she threw herself forward, as a bird pinioning its way into space. One small, dull splash echoed on the silence,--she was gone! I reached the spot a moment after she had vanished,--I leaned over the parapet,--I peered down into the gloomy water;--nothing there! Nothing but blank stillness--blank obscurity!

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Then, as I strained my sight over the monotonous width of the river, I saw a something lift itself into view,--a woman's robe blew upwards and outwards like a dark, wet sail--it swirled round once--twice--thrice,--and then it sank again! . . . My teeth chattered,--I clung to the stone parapet to prevent myself from falling. And yet a horrible sense of amusement stirred within me,--the satirical amusement of a fiend!--it seemed such a ludicrous thing to consider that, after all, this weak, fragile child had escaped me,--had actually gone quietly away where I could not, dared not follow! (Wormwood, pp. 285-286)

The last few chapters of the novel deal with various dramatic confrontations and revelations; the death of the woman whom the narrator now believes that he really loves; and a green cloud of absinthe hallucinations, one of which

is that of a leopard who seems to pursue the narrator through the streets of Paris:

A leopard of the forest at large in the heart of Paris!-- could anything be more strange and hideously terrifying? I stared at it,--it stared at me! I could almost count the brown velvet spots on its tawny hide,--I saw its lithe body quiver with the pulsations of its quick breath,--and for some minutes I was perfectly paralyzed with fear and horror;--afraid to stir an inch! Presently, as I stood inert and terror-stricken, I heard steps approaching, and a laborer appeared carrying some tin cans which clanked together merrily,--he whistled as he came along, and seemed to be in cheerful humor. I watched him anxiously. What would he do,--what would he say when he caught sight of that leopard lying on the bridge, obstructing his progress? Onward he marched indifferently,--and my heart almost ceased to beat for a second as I saw him coming nearer and nearer to the horrible creature. . . . What!--was he blind?-- Could he not see the danger before him? I strove to cry out,-- but my tongue was like stiff leather in my mouth,--I could not utter a syllable;--and lo!--while my fascinated gaze still rested on him he had passed me!--passed apparently over or through the animal I saw and dreaded! (Wormwood, p. 289)

Like Dickens and Collins, Marie Corelli had a passionate love for the drama-- especially the drama of Shakespeare. Like Dickens and Collins, she utilized the devices of the melodrama in her novels; and consequently, like them also-- whatever other merits we may argue over--she is never dull. To be sure, no less a critic than T. S. Eliot, in his essay on Collins and Dickens, has defended the melodramatic qualities of the sensation novelist:

But novels are still being written; and there is no contemporary novelist who could not learn something from Collins in the art of interesting and exciting the reader. So long as novels are written, the possibilities of melodrama must from time to time be re-explored. The contemporary "thriller" is in danger of becoming stereotyped; the conventional murder is discovered in the

first chapter by the conventional butler, and the murderer is discovered in the last chapter by the conventional inspector--after having been already discovered by the reader. The resources of Wilkie Collins are, in comparison, inexhaustible.

And even if we refused to take Collins very seriously by himself, we can hardly fail to treat him with seriousness if we recognize that the art of which he was a master was an art which neither Charles Reade nor Dickens despised. You cannot define Drama and Melodrama so that they shall be reciprocally exclusive; great drama has something melodramatic in it, and the best melodrama partakes of the greatness of drama.²⁸

In Marie Corelli's prophetic novels we can yet distinguish another ramification of the Gothic romance--that is, the scientific romance. The scientific romance is not derived, of course, exclusively through the Gothic romance; but rather indicates a wide diversity of influences, including tales of wonderful inventions, odysseys to other worlds, various utopias, and rare expeditions into the future.²⁹ While the term science fiction was not coined until 1929, a number of writers in the nineteenth-century led the way to the development of this genre--a genre still not considered quite respectable despite its association with such names as Mary Shelley, Samuel Butler, Robert Louis Stevenson, Conan Doyle, the young H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, and C. S. Lewis, many of whom were not only concerned with recounting marvelous stories, but with advancing themes of high seriousness as well.

²⁸T. S. Eliot, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens," Selected Essays (New York, 1950), pp. 417-418.

²⁹J. O. Bailey, Pilgrims Through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction (New York, 1947), pp. 13-27.

Studies of the scientific romance are generally in accord in defining scientific fiction as a "branch of fantasy identifiable by the fact that it eases the 'willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of its readers by utilizing an atmosphere of scientific credibility for its imaginative speculations in physical science, space, time, social science, and philosophy."³⁰ Such studies likewise agree in designating Mary Shelley, whose Frankenstein (1817) repudiates the supernatural in its Preface, as one who gave great impetus to the evolution of the genre by emphasizing a more rationalized supernaturalism in her romances. Nevertheless, while Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Jules Verne, among others, continued to treat Gothic themes in a scientific manner, the full development of the scientific utopia had to await the scientific revolution to foreshadow the Machine Age and for the theory of evolution; then, finally, the Gothic tale of terror could establish its locale in a science laboratory, instead of a medieval castle.³¹

Since they illustrate some combination of the supernatural and the pseudo-scientific, the Rosicrucian romances of Bulwer-Lytton and Marie Corelli are somewhere midway in this development. And, although in at least two of Miss Corelli's late novels, the science fiction elements easily

³⁰Sam Moskowitz, Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction (Cleveland and New York, 1957), p. 11.

³¹Bailey, pp. 28-29.

outweigh all other components, we find science fiction motifs in many of her early prophetic stories, including her very first novel, in which she sends her heroine spinning through space on an inter-planetary voyage with an angelic guide. Strangely enough, nearly all of the inhabitants of the planets visited by Miss Corelli's heroine seem to live an almost utopian existence. Thus, on Saturn, beautiful, lofty creatures "converse with the spirits of the air," and, after an existence of about two hundred years, die quietly without illness (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 177). Besides, having perfected the sciences, the arts, and themselves, these radiant beings require no authorities, have no need of marriage bonds, and do not doubt the reality of the Creator. Similarly, in the garden paradise of Venus where nature and art are united, the poet governs, and selfishness, marriage, and doubt are unknown; even as on Jupiter the dwellers work for and aspire after a higher existence in God. The latter planet is further described by Miss Corelli as an electric one, where "persons living hundreds of miles apart could yet converse together with perfect ease through an electric medium; ships ploughed the seas by electricity--in fact, everything in the way of science, art, and invention known to us was also known, only to greater perfection, because tempered and strengthened by an electric force which never failed" (A Romance of Two Worlds, pp. 178-179). Even more wonderful visions follow, climaxed by the sight of the fiery electric circle with Christ Himself, whose presence makes the angelic spirits, although not Miss Corelli, droop "their radiant heads like flowers in hot sunshine" (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 193).

Other visionary trips to a strange planet which was once his home but from which he has been exiled are taken by the poetic brother of the magician-like protagonist of The Soul of Lilith; yet, amid a jumble of insipid, pseudo-scientific manifestations, The Soul of Lilith remains memorable for its creation of a huge crystal disc of magnetic spar that reflects light rays from distant stars in intricate, regular patterns. Still more marvelously, when the invention collapses upon its inventor in a storm crushing him to death, the protagonist has poured upon it a mysterious fluid--reminiscent of the acid with which Ayesha destroys the body of Kallikrates in Sir Rider Haggard's She--a red liquid which runs over the stone like blood, crumbling it and extinguishing its brilliancy, "eating its substance away as rapidly as vitriol eats away the human skin,--blistering it and withering it visibly" (The Soul of Lilith, p. 297). One piece of the disc that lasts longer than the rest is said to curl and writhe "like a living thing under the absolutely noiseless and terribly destructive influence of that blood-like liquid that seemed to sink into it as water sinks into a sponge. . . till all at once it broke into a sparkle like flame, gleamed, smouldered, leaped high . . . and--disappeared" (The Soul of Lilith, p. 297).

Two very particular electrical inventions preoccupy Miss Corelli in two of her late romances. One is an electrical ship in The Life Everlasting (1911) which is propelled by electrical sails and shines at night; whereas the other, in The Secret Power (1921), which, according to the best custom of science fiction, must be destroyed at the end of the tale, is the helicopter-

like bird-plane that is powered by noiseless, electrical cylinders, or possibly radium, and that carries the heroine off to a Brazen City where live a race of immortal beings, who hear and know all that goes on in every country "on the wings of air and rays of light."³² And in the same novel, a radium bomb is depicted as destroying a part of California; even as in an earlier work, The Young Diana (1918), a sun machine--again similar to the life-giving pillar of flame in She--helps to transform the heroine into an eternally youthful, passionless beauty. Indeed, throughout her romances Miss Corelli exhibits a Rosicrucian concern with solar energy and electricity as vital forces; for her, light generates motion, and from motion, in turn, proceeds life.

From that 'Light,' the effulgence of God's own Actual Presence and Intelligence, came the Movement which dispelled 'darkness,' Movement, once begun, shaped all that which before was 'without form' and filled all that had been 'void.' Light is the positive exhalation and pulsation of the Divine Existence--the Active Personality of an Eternal God;--Light, which enters the soul and builds the body of every living organism,--therefore Light is Life.³³

Although, on the one hand, the voyage to other worlds is a conventional science fiction topic, and a prepossession with electricity and electrical inventions is characteristic of late nineteenth-century fiction, expressing itself in the Frank Reade dime-novels which were issued weekly from 1892 to

³²Marie Corelli, The Secret Power (New York, 1921), p. 75.

³³Marie Corelli, The Young Diana (New York, n. d.), pp. 132-133.

1900 and even earlier in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Jules Verne, who were succeeded by Percy Greg, Bulwer-Lytton, Rider Haggard, H. G. Wells, and others, Miss Corelli's unique contribution to the romance of her day was the introduction of religious themes into a supernatural, pseudo-scientific setting. In short, Miss Corelli was the self-styled herald of what she affirmed was a new, purified Christianity in an age which demanded a transformed Christianity, if not the complete repudiation of orthodoxy in favor of agnosticism.

In 1900, William T. Stead, the eminent journalist and enemy of Marie Corelli, expressed his exasperation with a public who could flock to read Mrs. Ward's Robert Elsmere (1888) and Miss Corelli's The Master Christian (1900) by submitting that the phenomenal sales of such books deserved more investigation than anything between their covers.³⁴ In at least one sense, of course, his comment is justifiable, insofar as it cannot be denied that some part of the great popularity accorded both works must be attributed to the fact that their respective authors habitually portrayed one of the consuming topics of the time--a matter on which they represented divergent views--the dilemma of faith and unfaith. Generally, while the Oxford movement can be said to have launched the religious novel, so that from the eighteen-forties onwards we find writers from a wide variety of backgrounds

³⁴W. T. Stead, "The Master Christian," The Review of Reviews, XXII (1900), 291.

engaged in composing religious romances, chiefly for propaganda purposes, as unbelief grew more widespread, the identifying mark of the great religious novels of the 'eighties and 'nineties gradually became one of doubt.³⁵

Accordingly, as Margaret Maison indicates, the religious novel evolved into the most irreligious of all novels.³⁶

As we might suspect, the novel of doubt was, in many instances, an autobiographical work; and two of the novelists who best described their unbelief were William Hale White in The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford (1881) and its sequel The Deliverance of Mark Rutherford (1885) and Mary Augusta Ward in a number of novels, particularly Robert Elsmere (1888). Both William Hale White and Mrs. Ward vividly illustrate the progressive loss of faith in their novels; and Robert Elsmere, following in the tradition of the novels of James Anthony Froude, Robert Buchanan, and William White, probably deserved its sensational success as the most "intelligent expression in fiction" of the "popular rejection of supernatural Christianity, the greatest religious phenomenon of late Victorian England. . . ."³⁷ This novel, which tells of a young clergyman's loss of faith through his contact with German Biblical studies and the resulting division between him and his fundamentalist wife, lapses into unconvincing didacticism only at its

³⁵Maison, pp. 3, 210-211.

³⁶Ibid., p. 224.

³⁷Ibid., p. 265.

conclusion when Elsmere, in compensating for his lack of belief, founds a charitable brotherhood just before his premature death.

If Robert Elsmere is written in a rather straightforward style with occasional hints of Victorian melodrama, another famous, autobiographical novel of doubt which received both popular and critical acclaim, The Story of an African Farm composed by Olive Schreiner under the name of Ralph Iron and published in 1883, is characterized by every sort of agonizing emotional display that could possibly accompany loss of faith. Hence, the little son of the overseer on the farm, Waldo, weeps, perspires, quivers, has visions, grovels on the floor, and sacrifices a mutton chop in lieu of a lamb to test the existence of God, as he wavers between belief and unbelief. Commenting upon the destruction of Waldo's sheep-shearing invention by the ruthless new manager of the African farm, Bonaparte Blenkins, Miss Schreiner is quite explicit about the futility of life:

"Oh, it is such a nice little machine," said Bonaparte, "one can't help feeling an interest in it. There is only one little improvement, one very little improvement, I should like to make."

Bonaparte put his foot on the machine, and crushed it into the sand. The boy looked up into his face.

"Looks better now," said Bonaparte, "doesn't it? If we can't have it made in England, we'll send it to America. Good-by; ta-ta," he added. "You're a great genius, a born genius, my dear boy; there's no doubt about it."

He mounted the gray mare and rode off. The dog watched his retreat with cynical satisfaction; but his master lay on the ground with his head on his arms, in the sand, and the little wheels and chips of wood lay on the ground around him. The dog jumped on to his back, and snapped at the black curls, till, finding that no notice was taken, he walked off to play

with a black beetle. The beetle was hard at work trying to roll home a great ball of dung it had been collecting all the morning; but Doss broke the ball, and ate the beetle's hind legs, and then bit off its head. And it was all play, and no one would tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing.³⁸

The embittered orphan cousin of the daughter of the owner of the farm, Lyndall, is a wretched new woman, for whom the "lifting up of the hands brings no salvation," and "existence is a great pot, and the old Fate who stirs it round cares nothing what rises to the top and what goes down, and laughs when the bubbles burst."³⁹ Lyndall consents to her own seduction and dies; and Miss Schreiner, in describing the beauty and tranquillity of the dead girl, asks:

Had she found what she sought for--something to worship? Had she ceased from being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of terrible mist over the face of the hereafter.⁴⁰

Another agnostic, whose miseries are delineated in a provocative style reminiscent of Miss Schreiner, is Jude Fawley in Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure (1896), first published serially in 1894 and 1895. Although he is an aspiring clergyman, Jude cannot reconcile his ambitions with "a religion in which sexual love" is "regarded as at its best a frailty and at its worst damnation," and one night he diabolically creeps into his garden and burns

³⁸Olive Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm (Boston, 1927), p. 116.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 294, 170.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 352.

all of his theological and ethical works, shaking them over the flames with a three-pronged fork.⁴¹ On the whole, Jude turns his back on faith without much struggle; in fact, Hardy remarks that "the sense of being no longer a hypocrite to himself afforded a relief to his mind which gave him calm."⁴² However, his prematurely aged son, Father Time, hangs himself and his brother and sister in despair; and, while the distracted parents await the inquest, two clergymen of different views argue about the eastward position. Although Marie Corelli joins Olive Schreiner and Thomas Hardy in their love for wild melodrama, and while she further shares with Miss Schreiner an enthusiasm for visions, trances, and swoonings--an enthusiasm in which she indulges even more than Miss Schreiner--Miss Corelli frequently denounced the bold themes of both naturalistic writers.

Happy doubters are found in a number of late Victorian novels such as those by George Macdonald, especially his Robert Falconer (1868), and George Gissing as exemplified by Workers in the Dawn (1880) and Born in Exile (1892). Similarly, the psychical hero of George Du Maurier's Peter Ibbetson (1892), a self-professed "congenital agnostic" whose mother and father had an aversion to Catholic priests, outlives his antipathy for the clergy but not for religion.⁴³ He dies in the Criminal Lunatic Asylum, and his cousin appraises

⁴¹Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York, 1923), p. 262.

⁴²Ibid., p. 263.

⁴³George Du Maurier, Peter Ibbetson (New York, 1919), p. 120.

him in his coffin:

As he lay there, in his still length and breadth,
he appeared gigantic--the most magnificent human being
I ever beheld; and the splendor of his dead face will
haunt my memory till I die.⁴⁴

The Way of All Flesh (1903), published twenty years after its composition and two years after the death of Queen Victoria, also recounts the progress toward doubt of Ernest Pontifex, a clergyman who, like Robert Elsmere, reads himself out of orthodoxy, and then devotes his time to the writing of anti-religious essays. The loss of faith is now no longer accompanied by regret:

He hated the life he had been leading ever since he had begun to read for orders; he could not argue about it, but simply he loathed it and would have no more of it. As he dwelt on the prospect of becoming a layman again, however disgraced, he rejoiced at what had befallen him, and found a blessing in this very imprisonment which had at first seemed such an unspeakable misfortune.⁴⁵

Rather it is a boon that must be shared with others:

To do him justice, it was not himself that he greatly cared about. He knew he had been humbugged, and he knew also that the greater part of the ills which had afflicted him were due, indirectly, in chief measure to the influence of Christian teaching; still, if the mischief had ended with himself, he should have thought little about it, but there was his sister, and his brother Joey, and the hundreds and thousands of young people throughout England whose lives were being blighted through the lies told them by people whose business it was to know better, but who scamped their work and shirked difficulties instead of facing them. It was this

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 416.

⁴⁵Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh (New York, 1950), p. 382.

which made him think it worth while to be angry, and to consider whether he could not at least do something towards saving others from such years of waste and misery as he had had to pass himself.⁴⁶

While Peter Ibbetson and Ernest Pontifex seem to triumph in their doubt, some of the heroes of the late Victorian religious novels, such as Robert Falconer and Robert Elsmere, turn to good works as a substitute for orthodoxy. And even as Miss Corelli was condemning the churches' use of incense, music, and vestments,⁴⁷ still other Victorian novelists were viewing their central

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 390.

⁴⁷ See Miss Corelli's The Master Christian with its "Appendix"--"Relics of Paganism in Christianity as Approved by English Bishops," pp. 603-604. Her description of the Church of Notre Dame de Lorette in Paris from the same novel is also indicative of her extreme views: "The Church of Notre Dame de Lorette in Paris with its yellow stucco columns, and its hideous excess of paint and gilding, might be a ball-room designed after the newest ideas of a vulgar nouveau riche rather than a place of sanctity. The florid-minded Blondel, pupil of the equally florid-minded Regnault, hastily sketched in some of the theatrical frescoes in the 'Chapel of the Eucharist,' and a misguided personage named Orsel, splashed out the gaudy decorations of the 'Chapel of the Virgin.' The whole edifice glares at the spectator like a badly-managed limelight, and the tricky, glittering, tawdry effect blisters one's very soul.

.....
 Here sometimes will sing a celebrated tenor, bulky and brazen,--pouring out from his bull-throat such liquid devotional notes as might lift the mind of the listener to Heaven if one were not so positive that a moral fiend sang them;--here sometimes may be seen the stout chanteuse who is the glory of open-air cafés in the Champs Elysées, kneeling with difficulty on a velvet hassock and actually saying prayers. And one must own that it is an exhilarating and moving sight to behold such a woman pretending to confess her sins, with the full delight of them written on her face, and the avowed intention of committing them all over again manifesting itself in every turn of her head, every grin of her rouged lips, and every flash of her painted eyes!" (p. 172)

character as actually drawn to some form of Christianity--primarily by its sensuous appeal. Thus, five years before Marius the Epicurean (1885), the aesthete John Henry Shorthouse had privately printed his John Inglesant, a propagandistic romance which frequently borders on the occult in its preoccupation with the mysticism of seventeenth-century Rosicrucianism. John Inglesant is an Anglican cavalier, who is sympathetic to Catholicism and whose vengeance for the murder of his brother takes him from the political and religious intrigues of the court of Charles I to the political and religious machinations of a plague-stricken Italy. Ecstasies and visions encompass him like a cloud, and are occasioned by looking at the spiritual face of Mary Collett, whom Inglesant loves, as she kneels in the church of Little Gidding; by the odor of garden flowers; by sunrises and sunsets; as well as by the colors of stained glass windows and the heavenly music and incense of the various churches that he visits on his adventures in England and Italy. At one point, he enters an Italian chapel during Mass and is mistaken by the simple priest and country folk for St. George in jewelled armor--and indeed, good grooming and elaborate costuming are an essential aspect of the character of Shorthouse's aristocratic hero.

In Marius the Epicurean, Pater's sensitive hero is attracted to Christianity by a combination of joyful beauties--by the handsomeness of a friend; by the "flowers and lights" of the home of a "virginal" Christian matron; and by the "sweet singing of the Eucharist."⁴⁸ Like Pater, Marius

⁴⁸Walter Pater, Marius the Epicurean (New York, n. d.), pp. 397, 330.

comes to perceive Christianity as a fusion of the Cyrenaic and Stoic philosophies; having sacrificed himself for his Christian friends, he is aided by some strange Christians who mistake him for one of them; and he dies amid the sensuous delights of the creed he loves:

In the moments of his extreme helplessness their mystic bread had been placed, had descended like a snowflake from the sky, between his lips. Soothing fingers had applied to hands and feet, to all those old passage-ways of the senses, through which the world had come and gone from him, now so dim and obstructed, a medicinale oil. It was the same people, who, in the gray, austere evening of that day, took up his remains, and buried them secretly, with their accustomed prayers; but with joy also, holding his death, according to their generous view in this matter, to have been of the nature of a martyrdom; and martyrdom, as the church had always said, a kind of sacrament with plenary grace.⁴⁹

As we have already noted, Marie Corelli harshly disapproved of the naturalism of the novels of Zola and Hardy; in addition, her comments on Miss Schreiner and Mrs. Ward were marked by a sharpness that was probably not only the consequence of their philosophy of skepticism but likewise of their acceptance by the very reviewers who had rejected Miss Corelli. Thus, she satirizes Olive Schreiner's style and creed in a chapter of The Silver Domino, and censures The Story of an African Farm as striking the "note of utter atheism and materialism. . . a blank negation of all positive or possible good in human life. . ." ⁵⁰ Through one of her characters in

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 428-429.

⁵⁰ Marie Corelli, Patriotism,--or Self-Advertisement?: A Social Note on the Present War (Philadelphia, 1900), p. 43.

Ardath, Miss Corelli refers to Robert Elsmere as a "pathetic" story which belabors Christianity with such "hard blows that it is almost a wonder it still breathes." She outlines the plot as one that "excites our sympathies in behalf of a clergyman, who, overwhelmed by scholarship, finds he can no longer believe in the religion he is required to teach, and who renounces his living. . . ." As a result of the large circulation of this novel, Miss Corelli assures us that "numbers of people who never doubted their creed before certainly doubt it now" (Ardath, p. 495).

Moreover, as we have seen, Miss Corelli rigidly opposes any attempt to introduce High Church or "Romish" Church practices into the simple ritual of the evangelical establishment. She feels that the sensuous appeals of incense, vestments, and operatic singing are pagan; and she even more strongly denounces hymns to the Virgin and the use of the confessional. Like earlier Victorian novelists, such as Mrs. Trollope, Charlotte Brontë, Miss Sinclair, and Charles Kingsley, she envisions a great Catholic conspiracy to convert England--a conspiracy which she develops in The Master Christian and Temporal Power. In these novels we find Miss Corelli's best, or possibly worst, delineations of the authoritarian Catholic clergy, particularly of the preposterously wicked Jesuit who is a reversion to the terrifying religious of The Monk and Moncada's autobiography, "The Tale of the Spaniard," in Melmoth the Wanderer. While the myth of "Jesuitocracy" prevailed in early and middle Victorian novels, as exemplified by Kingsley's Westward Ho!: The Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh (1855), in which the Jesuit order

is represented by a scheming Father Parsons and Father Campian, and missionaries baptize infants only to dash out their brains against the ground afterwards, a few Victorian writers such as Shorthouse and Thackeray sketched more sympathetically realistic portraits of the Jesuit. The Catholic clergy of Miss Corelli vary in type; but, for the most part, like Wilkie Collins and Sheridan Le Fanu, she persists in associating Catholicism with diablerie. Outstanding in the Corelli list of villains devoted to the spread of Catholicism is the Jesuitically devious, yellowishly pale Monsignor Gherardi, who is introduced to us as a sort of ecclesiastical tycoon in

The Master Christian:

There was scarcely a Roman Catholic "community" in the world, in which Gherardi had not a share;--and he was particularly concerned in "miraculous shrines", which were to him exactly in the same category as "companies" are to the speculator on the Stock Exchange. He had been cautious, prudent, and calculating from his earliest years,--from the time when, as the last male scion of the house of Gherardi he had been educated for the Ecclesiastical career at the "College of Nobles". He had read widely; and no religious or social movement took place anywhere without his knowing of it, and admitting it into his calculations as a sort of new figure in his banking sum. He was an extensive shareholder in the "Lourdes" business; and a careful speculator in all the religious frenzies of the uneducated and superstitious. His career had been very successful so far. He had amassed a considerable fortune; and away out towards Frascati he had a superb Villa, furnished with every modern luxury and convenience, (not rented in his own name, but in that of a man whom he paid heavily to serve him as his tool and menial,)--where a beautiful Neapolitan danseuse condescended to live as his mistress;--he was a diplomat for himself if not for his country, and kept his finger on the pulse of European politics as well as on the fluctuating fevers of new creeds. (The Master Christian, pp. 287-288)

Again, in The Master Christian, the secretary of the Archbishop of Rouen, Monsieur Claude Cazeau, with his white eyelashes, yellow teeth, and bullet head, is another industrious servant of Mother Church--one who is later stabbed and drowned by a maddened woman whom he has seduced and abandoned:

He was crafty and clever in his way,--one of those to whom the Yankee term "cute" would apply in its fullest sense,--and he had the happy knack of forgetting his own mistakes and follies, and excusing his own sins with as much ease as though he were one of the "blood-royal" of nations. Vices he had in plenty in common with most men,--except that his particular form of licentiousness was distinguished by a callousness and cruelty in which there was no touch of redeeming quality. As a child he had loved to tear the wings off flies and other insects, and one of his keenest delights in boyhood had been to watch the writhings of frogs into whose soft bodies he would stick long pins,--the frogs would live under this treatment four and five hours--sometimes longer, and while observing their agonies he enjoyed "that contented mind which is a perpetual feast." Now that he was a man, he delighted in torturing human beings after the same methods applied mentally, whenever he could find a vulnerable part through which to thrust a sharp spear of pain. (The Master Christian, p. 372)

And, in the same novel, we meet the Pope, an ineffectual symbol of a cadaverous faith:

On this occasion the Pope was enthroned in a kind of semi-state, on a gilded chair covered with crimson velvet; and a rich canopy of the same material, embroidered and fringed with gold, drooped in heavy folds above him. Attired in the usual white,--white cassock, white skull cap, and white sash ornamented with the emblematic keys of St. Peter, embroidered in gold threads at the ends,--his unhandsome features, pallid as marble, and seemingly as cold,--bloodless everywhere even to the lips,--suggested with dreadful exactitude a corpse in burial clothes just lifted from its coffin and placed stiffly upright in a sitting position. (The Master Christian, p. 413)

Easily the most ruthless of Miss Corelli's clerical monsters, however, appears in Temporal Power; he is Monsignor Del Fortis, special emissary of the Vicar-General of the Society of Jesus, who, having been apprehended in a criminal act, poisons himself. He is prayed for at midnight requiem mass sung before a "silent gathering of black-robed stern-featured men," and "buried with great pomp and solemn circumstance" (Temporal Power, p. 394). We are told that, at first glance, the unprepossessing Del Fortis reminds one of "a medieval priestly torturer."

Del Fortis was a dark, resentful-looking man of about sixty, tall and thin, with a long cadaverous face, very strongly pronounced features and small sinister eyes, over which the level brows almost met across the sharp bridge of nose. His close black garb buttoned to the chin, outlined his wiry angular limbs with an almost painful distinctness, and the lean right hand which he placed across his breast. . . looked more like the shrunken hand of a corpse than that of a living man. (Temporal Power, pp. 32-33)

Since, like Emma Worboise in such novels as Father Fabien: The Monk of Malham Tower (1875), Miss Corelli often presumes that the priestly profession is a mere cloak for licentiousness, she scarcely admits a Catholic priest into her early novels without somewhere indicating that he has either seduced at least one woman or is living momentarily with a paramour. Thus, one of the most melodramatic scenes of The Master Christian occurs when the Abbé Vergniaud happily confesses in his sermon from the altar of the tawdry Church of Notre Dame de Lorette in Paris that he has an illegitimate son; and the entire plot of Wormwood turns upon a clergyman's inability to keep his vow of celibacy.

Nevertheless, Marie Corelli's reply to the novel of doubt consists not just in the condemnation of depraved Catholic priests, and occasionally, like Charlotte Brontë, of hypocritical Protestant ministers; on the contrary, her prophetic novels dissolve all religious perplexities quite simply and clearly by supernatural intervention. Indeed, Miss Corelli's catalogue of wonders is an impressive one. The skeptical heroine of A Romance of Two Worlds (1886) is permitted to contemplate the heavens and Christ Himself; the post-hero of Ardath (1889), who has been paralyzed by the "blighting blow of blank atheism" (Ardath, p. 72), is converted by the love of an angel and by a vision of the wasted life he led in a previous existence five-thousand years before Christ; the hero of Barabbas (1893) dies in blissful belief after witnessing countless marvels, including the Resurrection of Christ; and, in a later novel, Holy Orders (1908), the momentary doubt of a simple clergyman is dispelled by the apparition of his lately slain wife. Some of Miss Corelli's doubters, however, remain recalcitrant--possibly because they are only rarely favored by such prodigies as those observed by her converts. Hence, the free-thinking hero-villain of Wormwood (1890) commits crime after crime under the domination of absinthe; the protagonist of The Soul of Lilit (1892) hardens himself to all of the miraculous evidences of God's existence and goes mad; the fatal woman of The Sorrows of Satan (1895) confesses to a belief in eternity just at the awful, anguished second of her death; and the ten-year old hero of The Mighty Atom (1896)--one of those tormented, Victorian child agnostics--hangs himself in

order to test the existence of God. Furthermore, unlike the heroine of Newman's Callista: A Sketch of the Third Century (1856), whose conversion is accomplished not without beauty-destroying suffering, Miss Corelli's converts may well be said to blossom into faith. The neurotic, ailing heroine of A Romance of Two Worlds becomes healthy, joyous, and vigorous, with a glow on her cheeks, a tint on her lips, a newly rounded figure, and a face "ready to dimple into glad mirth or bright laughter" (A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 245). So too, the hero of Ardath is transformed by faith:

He had always been a handsome man--yes, but there was certainly something more than handsome about him now. There was a singular magnetism in the flash of the fine, soft eyes, a marvellous sweetness in the firm lines of the perfect mouth, a royal grandeur and freedom in the very poise of his well-knit figure and noble head, that certainly had not before been apparent in him. (Ardath, p. 437)

And Barabbas, the ruffian, "a type of human Doubt aspiring unto Truth," is transfigured into a person of great beauty, with soft, earnest eyes, and a faint, grave smile. In death he is awesome:

. . . a smile was on his face, and . . . his dark and rugged features were smoothed and tranquillised into an expression of exceeding beauty. There was something grand and impressive in the aspect of his powerful figure lying thus passive in an attitude of such complete repose,--his crossed hands and closed eyes suggested that eternal calm wherein, as in a deep sea is found the pearl of Infinite Knowledge. (Barabbas, p. 475)

In addition to these gloriously metamorphosed skeptics, Miss Corelli also concerns herself with the already radiant believer, such as the mysterious non-sectarian monks who are the background heroes of the prophetic novels

and who physically may have some affinity with Kingsley's muscular Christians

. . . he had seldom or never seen finer types of splendid, healthful, and vigorous manhood at its best and brightest. As noble specimens of the human race alone they were well worth looking at; they might have been warriors, princes, emperors. . . anything but monks. (Ardath, p. 19)

In fact, the Christ of Barabbas seems to bear some unfortunate resemblance to a muscular Christian:

Still as a statue of sunlit marble He stood, erect and calm, His white garments flowing backward from His shoulders in even picturesque folds, thus displaying His bare rounded arms, crossed now on His breast in a restful attitude of resignation, yet in their very inertness suggesting such mighty muscular force as would have befitted a Hercules.⁵¹ (Barabbas, p. 29)

Although Miss Corelli had previously dared to introduce a glimpse of Christ in A Romance of Two Worlds, it was her portrayal of Christ in Barabbas which she claims caused her to separate from her first publisher George Bentley, who "had not the courage to publish a poetic romance which introduced, albeit with a tenderness and reverence unspeakable. . . the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ" (The Life Everlasting, pp. 26-27). Indeed, while a handful of religious novels had been attempted with Christ as a central character, Miss Corelli was the first English novelist to popularize New Testament fiction, especially through her Barabbas, in which Christ, who never speaks out of the context of the Gospels, appears as a major figure. Barabbas met with such unprecedented success that it was

⁵¹See above, p. 51, for Miss Corelli's equation of Satan with Hercules.

translated into every known European language, as well as Hindustani, Gujarati, and various other Eastern dialects. Later, Miss Corelli used Christ again as a chief character--this time as the boy-hero of The Master Christian who goes about working marvels and miracles in nineteenth-century France and Italy.

Thus, on the one hand, Miss Corelli scarcely seems to rise above her age; rather she enlarges upon what has already been done--and in boldness she is second to none. On the other hand, she is the only writer of her day to combine elements of the Rosicrucian and Gothic, the scientific, and the religious in her fiction. In a decade of doubt she treated science "as the handmaid of religion,"⁵² displaying the heavens and its wonders and Christ Himself; once more, therefore, we must agree with Margaret M. Maison who, in summarizing her views on Miss Corelli, declares:

In spite of the very glaring defects and limitations of Marie Corelli's sensational approach and style it is an undeniable fact that she brought zest, vitality, vision and imagination to Victorian religious fiction at a time when it most needed them. Queen Victoria, Gladstone, Tennyson, and Anglican and Catholic clergy alike, were quick to praise her colourful efforts to uphold the cause of Christianity in fiction at a time when it was fashionable to decry it, to write enthusiastically of the supernatural as a Christian rather than as a spiritualist or a theosophist, and to accept the findings of contemporary science as a confirmation rather than a denial of the divine order.⁵³

⁵²Maison, p. 337.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 330-331.

CHAPTER III

THEMES

It is not remarkable that one of the works much admired by Marie Corelli should be Elizabeth Barrett Browning's verbose socialistic novel in blank verse Aurora Leigh (1857), a poem which treats of a woman writer--a favorite study of Miss Corelli--who, while at first blinding herself to the value of love, finally avows its worth at the end of the ninth and last book:

. . . Passioned to exalt
The artist's instinct in me at the cost
Of putting down the woman's, I forgot
No perfect artist is developed here
From any imperfect woman. Flower from root,
And spiritual from natural, grade by grade
In all our life. A handful of the earth
To make God's image! the despised poor earth,
The healthy, odorous earth,--I missed with it
The divine Breath that blows the nostrils out
To ineffable inflatus,--ay, the breath
Which love is. Art is much, but Love is more.
O Art, my Art, thou'rt much, but Love is more!
Art symbolizes heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven.¹

The pervading theme of Miss Corelli's novels, then, is love or its negation--love between the sexes and love for God, both kinds of love being

¹Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh," The Complete Poetical Works (Boston, 1900), p. 405.

inextricably involved one with the other. Through love, religious conflicts, physical ailments, and social perplexities are surmounted; without love, disease, discontent, and doubt cause physical and moral regression. A spiritualizing force, true love between man and woman grows toward God; such love may have been preordained long centuries ago and may well endure although one of the lovers exists in another sphere.

Needless to say, since she attaches such importance to the subject, Miss Corelli's pronouncements on love are numerous and lengthy--sometimes even contradictory. Generally, however, she follows Rosicrucian thought in her reflections on divine and human love--both of which she readily equates with life and electricity, or radio-activity. Thus, in A Romance of Two Worlds, God manifests Himself to the heroine as a revolving world in the center of an electric circle composed of the seven rainbow colors. God's love, which is exhibited in this electrical phenomenon, draws the ardent soul, or the soul which is likewise electrically charged, to itself. Because all souls are a part of God, they are one day destined to return to Him; and can, therefore, know only regression or advancement in their various purifying existences in material bodies. Neither destruction nor eternal damnation is possible, and love is the means of redemption. As one of Miss Corelli's many Oriental seers flatly declares in a passage that is echoed throughout the novels, especially the spiritualistic romances:

. . . to understand the 'why' of life we must first of all realise that its origin is Love. Love creates life because it must; even agnostics, when pushed to the wall in argument

grant that some mysterious and mighty Force is at the back of creation,--a Force which is both intelligent and beneficent. The trite saying 'God is Love' is true enough, but it is quite as true to say 'Love is God.' The commencement of universes, solar systems and worlds is the desire of Love to express Itself. No more and no less than this. From desire springs action,--from action life. It only remains for each living unit to bring itself into harmonious union with this one fundamental law of the whole cosmos,--the expression and action of Love. . . . (The Life Everlasting, pp. 243-244)

Similarly, in her "Prologue" to The Life Everlasting, Miss Corelli associates life and love with radio-activity--a term that she apologetically explains was not known to her when she enunciated her electric creed some twenty years earlier:

. . . as scientists have proved--"Radium is capable of absorbing from surrounding bodies some unknown form of energy which it can render evident as heat and light." This is precisely what the radio-activity in each individual soul of each individual human being is ordained to do,--to absorb an 'unknown form of energy which it can render evident as heat and light.' Heat and Light are the composition of Life;--and the Life which this radio-activity of Soul generates in itself and of itself, can never die. (The Life Everlasting, p. 19)

Like the Rosicrucians, Miss Corelli seems to believe that there is an attraction between souls that emanate from the same Star Angel; unlike the Rosicrucians, however, she explains human love figuratively in terms of a flame, which, while it illuminates one soul, must find its counterpart in another soul in order to achieve fulfillment. In brief, love is a flame, which must be dual to be perfect, and which in its completed state contains the essence of happiness, youth, beauty, and everlasting life. Moreover, Miss Corelli seems to combine a Rosicrucian preoccupation with reincarnation

with an un-Rosicrucian adherence to the old doctrine of elective affinities in her delineation of love, particularly in the spiritualistic romances. One of the fullest developments of this latter doctrine, of course, is to be ascertained in the Goethe novel of 1807 that defines love, with reference to the chemistry of the day, as "the mutual attraction of two substances already chemically linked to others" which "separate and establish a new bond with their kindred by choice. . . ." ² Love, then, is analogously construed as so reducing its victims to unfree elements of nature that even a seemingly pious girl like the heroine of Goethe's novel succumbs for a while to an overwhelming passion for a married man. But, while Goethe makes his novel a statement of his own faith in the indissolubility of the marriage bond and thus a repudiation of elective affinities, nevertheless Marie Corelli-- conventionally moralistic though she may otherwise seem--appears to propound, like Robert Browning, some sort of modified doctrine of elective affinities. As anyone familiar with Wagner's Der Fliegende Holländer (1843), Lohengrin (1850), Tristan und Isolde (1865), and "Ring" cycle (completed 1874) can appreciate, however, the dramatic application of such an unreal theory is possible only in a romantically charged, mystical, mythical setting, and even then can result in such embarrassingly ludicrous scenes as the meeting of the Dutchman and Senta or the awakening of Brünnhilde by Siegfried. So too, whereas the prophetic novels of Marie Corelli afford many illustrations of

²Frederick Unger in the "Introduction" to Elective Affinities by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, trans. James Anthony Froude and R. Dillon Boylan (New York, 1962), p. vi.

her fanciful observations on love--observations which even she has sense enough not to reiterate in her more realistic novels--the mystical apparatus, although successfully restrained in A Romance of Two Worlds (1886) and Ardath (1889), is completely uncurbed in The Soul of Lilith (1892), Ziska (1897), and The Life Everlasting (1911), a novel which nonetheless remains Miss Corelli's most elaborate exposition of visionary love. Accordingly, the three principal characters of A Romance of Two Worlds are loved by companion-spirits that live in another sphere; while the hero of Ardath, through the intercession of the angel-spirit of the woman whom he scorned in a previous existence five-thousand years before Christ, is allowed to relive a part of his former life as a friend of himself. His consequent repentance causes the spirit of his beloved to take on a corporeal existence in order to become his wife. Similarly, in Ziska, when the soul of an ancient Egyptian dancer is reincarnated so that she may seek vengeance on her reincarnated murderer, the two tortured beings recognize at the last that they were pre-ordained for each other and merge in a mystical love death. Not so fortunate, however, are the lovers of The Soul of Lilith, whose protagonist, in wrongfully choosing to love the body of a dead girl--her shadow--which he has kept in a state of suspended animation and to ignore her soul, is afflicted with a humbling madness through which he must earn his chance to love again, presumably in some future existence either in this world or some other. And the two unhappy lovers of The Life Everlasting are allowed glimpses of their past existences in which a scrupulous sense of morality

made one or the other blamefully deny himself the right to love. According to accepted Rosicrucian thought, the predestined lovers of these novels have distinct recollections of their former lives; meet friends and enemies from these lives; and are even determined in the manner of their lives by their prior existences, although, at the same time, the Rosicrucians do not hold that one is necessarily reincarnated in the identical sex, but rather that one must assume at different periods both sexes in order to learn all of the mysteries of life.

In two of Miss Corelli's late prophetic novels, The Young Diana (1918) and The Secret Power (1921), the heroines are visualized as such idealized beings that they are incapable of feeling love on an ordinary material plane; they are, instead, too ethereal "to wallow in the styes of sensual and material life"--they are clothed in a "vesture of fire and light, as radiant as any spirit of legendary lore, . . . as far removed from the clay man of low desires as the highest star from the deepest earth" (The Young Diana, p. 372). And, indeed, although reincarnated spirits and fantastic manifestations in the heavens and on the earth are noticeably missing from Miss Corelli's more realistic romances, ideal love--or its lack--is still the primary theme of Vendetta! (1886), Thelma (1887), Wormwood (1890), The Murder of Delicia (1896), Boy (1900), Temporal Power (1902), God's Good Man (1904), The Treasure of Heaven (1906), Holy Orders (1908), and Love and the Philosopher (1923), as well as of the autobiographical novels Innocent (1914) and Open Confession (1925). Again, love--even commonplace human

love--is depicted as a refining soul-fire that eats away the impurities of the body and leads men back to the source of all love. Thus, love occasionally finds the same hackneyed treatment in these novels as in a second-rate Elizabethan sonnet sequence. Sometimes, as in Innocent, it is defined in terms of an old medieval legend; more often, as in A Romance of Two Worlds and The Life Everlasting, it is portrayed by a supposedly ancient Oriental manuscript such as the one cited by a visionary, princely lover in Temporal Power:

'Of all the sentiments, passions or virtues which in their divers turns affect the life of a man, the influence and emotion of Love is surely the greatest and highest. We do not here speak of the base and villainous craving of bodily appetite; but of that pure desire of the unfettered soul which beholding perfection, straightway and naturally flies to the same. This love doth so elevate and instruct a man, that he seeketh nothing better than to be worthy of it, to attempt great deeds and valiantly perform them, to confront foul abuses, and most potently destroy them,--and to esteem the powers and riches of this world as dross, weighed against this rare and fiery talisman. For it is a jewel which doth light up the heart, and make it strong to support all sorrow and ill fortune with cheerfulness, knowing that it is in itself of so lasting a quality as to subjugate all things and events unto its compelling sway.' (Temporal Power, p. 126)

Having generally examined Miss Corelli's views on love, we shall not be surprised to discover that the typical heroine of a Marie Corelli romance is, like the heroine of Aurora Leigh, an artist--writer, sculptress, dancer, painter, or pianist--who prizes love above everything--even above art. She is no prim Victorian governess or pious Dickensian prop, but a strong-minded, independent woman who is frequently set in relief against a background that may well include the sensual, unappreciative, envious lover

or husband; the sensual, dark fatal woman; the unloving and unlovable new woman; or some combination of two or even all three types. Moreover, as we have noted before, the Marie Corelli heroine, human or angelic, is an idealized version of Miss Corelli herself; and is easily recognized by her unassuming, modest demeanor; by her white gown and flowers; and by her brownish-blond hair and iris-blue eyes. Chiefly, she is characterized by her didactic adherence to womanliness and conventional morality, and, of course, by her simple espousal of the cause of love. Hence, the loving husband of Thelma, Sir Philip Errington, admits:

"My Thelma!" he whispered, "there is nothing left-- nothing at all worth living for--save Love!"

"Ah! but that," she answered, softly, "is everything!"³

And Miss Corelli adds:

Is it so, indeed? Is Love alone worth living for-- worth dying for? Is it the only satisfying good we can grasp at among the shifting shadows of our brief existence? In its various phases and different workings, is it, after all, the brightest radiance known in the struggling darkness of our lives? (Thelma, p. 413)

Even as the stainless, lofty author-heroine of The Soul of Lilith must finally concede:

Without love we are powerless. With it, we can compass all things. . . . it is the clue to the great Secret,--the only key to God's mystery. (The Soul of Lilith, p. 423)

One of the most innocent and affectionate of Miss Corelli's heroines is the blonde-haired, blue-eyed, Valkyrian Thelma, who is deceived by a

³Marie Corelli, Thelma (New York and London, n. d.), p. 413.

jealously vicious society beauty and her sensual male accomplice into believing that her husband Sir Philip Errington is no longer faithful to her. Unlike the other Corellian villainesses, the dark-eyed siren of Thelma is allowed to feel remorse--in fact, after weeping "for an hour or more" over a letter of forgiveness from Thelma, she spends the rest of her life in humble penitence, never coming near to Thelma again because she fears that she can "never again meet the clear regard of those beautiful, earnest, truthful eyes" (Thelma, p. 414). The accomplice Sir Francis Lennox, however, who attempts to seduce Thelma, incurs the usual melodramatic fate accorded a Corellian monster in a scene in which the author levels her aim at a number of her favorite targets. Consequently, Sir Francis, having been run over by a train, is carried into his luxurious apartment where the stretcher bearers make room for him on a velvet sofa by removing the latest issue of Truth and two of Zola's novels:

. . . a surgeon who was present gently turned back the cover that hid the injured man's features and exposed them to full view. Was that Sir Francis? that blood-smeared, mangled creature?--that the lascivious dandy--the disciple of no-creed and self-worship? Errington shuddered and averted his gaze from that hideous face so horribly contorted, yet otherwise death-like in its rigid stillness. There was a grave hush. The surgeon still bent over him--touching here, probing there, with tenderness and skill--but finally he drew back with a hopeless shake of the head.

"Nothing can be done," he whispered. "Absolutely nothing!"

At that moment Sir Francis stirred--he groaned and opened his eyes; what terrible eyes they were, filled with that look of intense anguish, and something worse than anguish--fear--frantic fear--coward fear--fear that was always more overpowering than his bodily suffering.

He stared wildly at the little group assembled--strange

faces, so far as he could make them out, that regarded him with evident compassion. What--what was all this--what did it mean? Death? No, no! he thought madly, while his brain reeled with the idea--death? What was death?--darkness, annihilation, blackness--all that was horrible--unimaginable! God! he would not die! God!--who was God? No matter--he would live; he would struggle against this heaviness--this coldness--this pillar of ice in which he was being slowly frozen--frozen--frozen!--inch by inch! He made a furious effort to move, and uttered a scream of agony, stabbed through and through by torturing pain.

"Keep still!" said the surgeon pityingly.

Sir Francis heard him not. He wrestled with his bodily anguish till the perspiration stood in large drops on his forehead. He raised himself, gasping for breath, and glared about him like a trapped beast of prey.

"Give me brandy!" he muttered, chokingly. "Quick--quick! Are you going to let me die like a dog?--damn you all!"

The effort to move--to speak--exhausted his sinking strength--his throat rattled--he clinched his fists and made as though he would spring off his couch--when a fearful contortion convulsed his whole body--his eyes rolled up and became fixed--he fell heavily back--dead! (Thelma, pp. 357-358)

Exceptionally melodramatic is the contrast between the angel-heroine Edris of Ardath, with her long, fair hair and mystical Ardath flowers, and the raven-haired Lysia, with her "wreath of small serpents' heads cunningly fashioned in rubies and rose brilliants, and set in such a manner that they appeared to lift themselves from out the dusky hair as though in darting readiness to sting" (Ardath, p. 193), who, in the manner of the Gothic diabolical beauty, poisons her lovers when they get out of hand. More human than either Ardath's Edris or Lysia are the violinist and novelist heroines of Wormwood and The Murder of Delicia, both of whom die after having lavished their love on unworthy men. Similarly, the heroine of Boy lives a lifetime of devotion to the memory of a dead man, who, unknown to her, had

intended to abandon her; the heroine-painter of The Master Christian is stabbed by her envious lover; the heroine of The Young Diana is forsaken by her lover of many years and taken advantage of by her selfish, sensual, parasitical parents; and the heroine of Temporal Power--another Mrs. Besant or Maude Gonne--who writes the revolutionary treatises and other propaganda for a socialist leader who is supposedly a cross between William Morris and John Burns,⁴ is murdered by him when she rejects his advances and gives her love to another man. Miss Corelli's comment at this point is characteristic for its bitterness, if not for its brevity:

And so had she fulfilled the common lot of women, which is, taken in the aggregate, to be wronged and slain (morally, when not physically) by the very men they have most unselfishly sought to serve! (Temporal Power, p. 515)

While other happier heroines who live for love are to be found in The Soul of Lilith, God's Good Man, The Treasure of Heaven, The Life Everlasting, and Love and the Philosopher, one of Miss Corelli's most controversially autobiographical characters is Mavis Clare,⁵ a novelist who appears in The Sorrows of Satan. She is a "slight feminine creature"--"a fair-haired girl in a white gown," whose "small head was surely never made for the wearing of deathless laurels, but rather for a garland of roses (sweet and perishable) twined by a lover's hand" (The Sorrows of Satan, p. 217). This blithe

⁴W. T. Stead, "Marie Corelli's New Novel," pp. 312-316.

⁵See W. T. Stead, "The Sorrows of Satan--and of Marie Corelli," The Review of Reviews, XII (1895), 453-464.

ingenue lives in a flower-garlanded cottage with her dogs and reviewer-named birds; the devil himself kneels to her and asks her to pray for him, and the hero feels that he must expiate his sins in order to become worthy of one day being her husband.

Mavis Clare is juxtaposed with Lady Sibyl Elton, a fatal new woman who goes from the one extreme of icy coldness to the other extreme of flaming desire in the progress of the novel. She must die violently like her sister temptresses of Vendetta!, Ardath, Holy Orders, and Barabbas; it is in the latter work that we encounter another controversial character--this time a Corellian vampire--Judith Iscariot, who is made to figure prominently in the drama of the Crucifixion as the mistress of Caiaphas and Barabbas. This scarlet woman, who later dies a repentant, raving-wise lunatic, wears a mantle with "the glowing tint of fire" in it, and is otherwise described at tedious Victorian length:

Well did she know her own surpassing charm,--and thoroughly did she estimate the value of her fatal power to lure and rouse and torture all whom she made the victims of her almost resistless attraction.

.
 Nature, in a picturesque mood, had done wondrous things for her,--things that in the ordinary opinion of humankind, generally outweigh virtue and cleanness of the soul in the sight of Heaven. To Nature therefore the blame was due for having cast the red glow of a stormy sunset into the bronze gold of her hair,--for having melted the blackness of night and the fire of stars together and set this mingled darkness and dazzle floating liquidly in her eyes,--for having bruised the crimson heart of the pomegranate-buds and made her lips the colour of the perfect flower,--and for having taken the delicate cream and pink of early almond blossoms and fixed this soft flushing of the Spring's life-blood in the colouring of her radiant face. (Barabbas, pp. 133, 134-135)

Occasionally, as we have already suggested, the fatal woman is combined with an exaggerated version of the new woman. Sometimes, however--and the effect is usually more humorous than dreadful--the new woman is depicted as a perplexing sort of monster in her own right. According to Miss Corelli at least, the new woman is a completely loveless creature, who, like Thomas Gradgrind of Hard Times, considers sentiment an absurd fancy and otherwise lacks imagination. If she is young and beautiful like Lucy Sorrel of The Treasure of Heaven, she may seek out the economic security of a wealthy old husband; or if she is married like Mrs. James D'Arcy-Muir of Boy, caring little for husband or child, she may choose advanced ideas as an excuse for degenerating into a sloven:

Indolence was her chief characteristic,--she hated any sort of trouble. She only washed herself under protest, as a sort of concession to the civilisation of the day. She had been gifted with an abundance of beautiful hair, of a somewhat coarse texture, yet rich in colour and naturally curly,--it was "a nuisance," she averred,--and as soon as she married she cut it short, "to save the bother of doing it in the morning," as she herself stated.

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 . . . finding that a short skirt and loose-fitting blouse formed a comfortable sort of "get-about" costume she adopted it, and stuck to it morning, noon, and night. Always inclined to embonpoint, she managed to get positively stout in a very short time; and chancing to read in a journal an article on "hygiene" which eloquently proved that corsets were harmful and really dangerous to health, she decided to do without them. So that by the time Boy was three years old, Mrs. D'Arcy-Muir, in her continual study of personal ease, had developed a loose, floppy sort of figure, which the easy-fitting blouse covered but did not disguise; to save all possibility of corns she encased her somewhat large feet in soft felt

slippers, swept the short hair from off her brows, did without collars and cuffs, and "managed" her small house in Hereford Square in her own fashion, which "managing" meant having everything at sixes and sevens, meals served at all hours, and a general preparation for the gradual destruction of Boy's digestion by giving him his bread-and-milk and other nourishment at moments when he least expected it.⁶

But, without doubt, Miss Corelli's most astonishing new woman is Honoria Maggs of My Wonderful Wife: A Study in Smoke (1889), a hungry, coffee-drinking, frizzy-fringed, stalwart Amazon, who, although married, judges marriage a mistake. And, as if to test the validity of this latter opinion, she treats her bothersomely old-fashioned husband like "one of the boys"; and entrusts the care of her unwanted baby to two ungrammatical, beer-drinking women. This sporty, slangy wonderful wife is thus delineated by her baffled narrator-husband:

During our courtship Honoria was not in the least bit sentimental; she was far too sensible for that. She never wanted a kiss in a dark passage; she would have been justly enraged had I suggestively trodden on her toes under the table. She never wished to stop and look at the moon on her way home from any neighbor's house or place of amusement; not a bit of it! She was a thoroughly practical, capable, healthy female, utterly devoid of romance. I was glad of this, because I had been lately reading in the magazines and newspapers that romance of any kind was unwholesome, and I did not want an unwholesome wife. And she was tremendously healthy; there was no sickly mawkishness or die-away langour about her! She wrote a novel--yes, and published it too; but it was not rubbish, you understand. By rubbish, I mean it was not full of silly sentiments, like Byron's verses or Shakespeare's plays; it had no idyllic-sublime stuff in it. It was a sporting novel, full of slap-dash vigour and stable slang; a really jolly, go-ahead, over-hill-and-dale, cross-country sort of book, with just a thread of a plot in it, which didn't matter, and an abrupt wind-up that left you in the

⁶Marie Corelli, Boy (Philadelphia, 1900), pp. 12-14.

lurch, wondering what it was all about; in short, the kind of reading that doesn't bother a fellow's brain. It was a great success, partly because she, Honoria Maggs found out the names of all the critics and "beat them up," as she frankly said, in her own irresistibly dominant way, and partly because the Duke of Havilands. . . swore it was "the most doosid clever thing he had ever clapped eyes on in print." Her name was in everybody's mouth for a short time, and in the full flush of her glory she went off to the moors partridge-shooting, and "bagged" such a quantity of game that the fact was chronicled in all the society journals; particularly that smart paper that always abuses our venerable Queen in its delightful columns.⁷

When the husband presses his wife to give up hunting and an argument threatens to ensue, she urges him not to lose his temper because she never does; and he relapses into the passive acquiescence of "a calm understanding."

I. . . would have kissed her, but that vile cigar stuck out of her mouth and prevented me. Besides, I was smoking my own particular "vile" and it was no use disturbing myself or her just then. Moreover, did she not evince a wholesome dislike of sentiment? And is not kissing a sentimental business, totally unsuited to the advanced intelligence of the advanced woman of our advancing day? (My Wonderful Wife, p. 195)

In the end, the suffering of the husband is terminated by a separation which finds his wife taking up a career as a lecturer "On the Advisability of Men's Apparel for Women"--a lecture which includes practical illustrations of its author's theory.

The spiritualized love of the Marie Corelli heroine, therefore, is paralleled in most of Miss Corelli's stories by the excessive physical

⁷Marie Corelli, "My Wonderful Wife," Cameos (Philadelphia, 1896), pp. 180-181.

passion of some of her villainous men and women and by the complete lovelessness of others. The typical Marie Corelli plot, however, combines themes of human love with themes of faith--of divine love and religion. Indeed, it is extremely difficult, as we have in part indicated, to isolate the love themes of Marie Corelli's tales from the religious and social themes. Faith, for example, is one product of love; and faith, effected through love on the divine and human levels, offers one thread of continuity in the prophetic novels, and is otherwise evident in a few of the remaining romances. Hence, an awakening love for God, as well as for a soul-mate from another world, kindles the birth of belief in the heroine of A Romance of Two Worlds. So too, the agnostic hero of Ardath clings to "the Shadow of his Former Self and to the illusory pictures of that Former Self's pleasures and vices and vanities" (The Life Everlasting, p. 24), until the love of an angel, who has already died for him in a prior existence, brings him faith; even as the protagonist of The Soul of Lilith never advances beyond an undue attachment to the body of a girl, and is subsequently denied both the manifestation of her soul and a consequent faith in God. Likewise, Barabbas with its predictive denunciation of an un pitying St. Peter and priests and priestcraft, and The Sorrows of Satan, with its graphic portrayal of a heart-sick devil, supposedly illustrate "the martyrdom which is always the world's guerdon to Absolute Good,--and secondly, the awful, unimaginable torture which must, by Divine Law, for ever be the lot of Absolute Evil" (The Life Everlasting, p. 28). Barabbas is converted to faith through love's

refinement of his baser passions; while the hero of The Sorrows of Satan finds true love for a woman and belief in and love for a God only after he has put aside the sensual pleasures that the devil's money and magic can provide for him, and after he has risen above a misdirected ardor for his vampire wife. The next of the prophetic novels, as Miss Corelli enumerates them, The Master Christian, continues the story of God's love begun in Barabbas into the nineteenth-century, and envisions the return of a loving Christ Child into a world of fleshly love and selfish sectarianism. As usual, Miss Corelli berates the worldliness and fanaticism of the Catholic Church in particular, and further illustrates the perversion of love in many of her characters--both priests and laymen alike--who indulge their bestial passions in a remarkable manner, obviously unaware of the frightening fates Miss Corelli has prepared for them. In contrast, the final prophetic novel The Life Everlasting rings a positive note as a paean of praise for the glory of the higher love in its definition of heaven as:

The immortal union of two Souls in one, creatures of God's eternal light, partaking each other's thoughts, bestowing upon each other the renewal of joy, and creating loveliness in form and action by their mutual sympathy and tenderness. Age cannot touch them--death has no meaning for them,--life is their air and space and movement--life palpitates through them and warms them with colour and glory as the sunshine warms and reddens the petals of the rose--they grow beyond mortality and are immune from all disaster--they are a world in themselves, involuntarily creating other worlds as they pass from one phase to another of production and fruition. For there is no good work accomplished without love,--no great triumph achieved without love,--no fame, no victory gained without love! The lovers of God are the beloved of God!--their passion is divine, knowing no weariness, no

satiety, no end! For God is the Supreme Lover and there is nothing higher than Love! (The Life Everlasting, pp. 378-379)

Of the other three romances which we have chosen to consider among Miss Corelli's spiritualistic works, Ziska deals with evil, sensual love which is transformed into redeeming spiritual love; and The Young Diana and The Secret Power--which seem to expand upon the love-faith concepts of The Life Everlasting--regard that love which can know fulfillment only on another, more godly plane of existence. In fact, The Secret Power represents in four of its principal female characters a summation of just about everything Miss Corelli has had to say about love. Hence, the scientist-heroine who does not believe in marriage departs for an advanced civilization--the secret of which is disclosed to her by a Catholic monk who is a resident of this mystical country--in order to satisfy her yearning for a higher love; her society friend, however, seeks a socially advantageous, but loveless, marriage to an aged millionaire; at the same time, an aristocratic confidante symbolizes the practical concept of love entertained by the modern, disillusioned woman; and a dark, primitive beauty typifies the old-fashioned, passionate, earthy woman who gives everything for the man she loves, expecting and getting nothing in return.

We have previously noted the perversion of love and faith depicted in Miss Corelli's sensual Catholic clergymen--particularly her Gothic Jesuits. While The Master Christian represents her most vicious exposition of the Catholic Church and its exponents, other sensual and godless ministers--usually of the High Church variety--caricature the type of simple low

churchman which Miss Corelli visualizes as admirable in the heroes of God's Good Man and Holy Orders, her two religious novels. In the latter work, a plain, country clergyman, the Reverend Richard Everton, is congratulated by a number of London prelates for his sermon in a High Anglican Church because it has "drawn so much out of the pockets of a congregation in one morning" (Holy Orders, p. 362).

Everton here acknowledged the presence of a handsome man of middle age, about as portly as the Bishop, but rather more symmetrical in height and build, though owning less shapely legs than those of his ecclesiastical superior. He was an impressive individual, with an elocutionary voice and an elocutionary manner, and was highly popular with that particular section of church-going society who like their religious doctrines served up to them like dessert, on painted plates with satin doilies, and finger-bowls full of rose water. He greeted Everton with a grave cordiality that became his height and general appearance, and as he was the only additional guest whom the Bishop had invited, luncheon was no longer delayed. Seated at table, the four gentlemen in Holy Orders began to exchange ideas on the topics of the day, and though at first Richard took a ready and eloquent part in the conversation, he soon found himself out of the running and quite behind his companions in what is called the social point of view. Growing more and more silent, he presently sat quietly listening to the flow of talk between the Bishop, the Archbishop and the Reverend 'Mother Carey' in more or less pained bewilderment. Money was unquestionably their favorite subject,--the wealth of this, that, or t'other personage being discussed, declared, or denied,--and various ideas for 'drawing' congregations were mentioned as being of vital importance.

"But we must not go quite so far,"--said the Archdeacon, in his deep, vibrant tones--"not quite so far as our excellent friends in America! Over there the services are extremely 'up-to-date.' One minister in New York has, so I hear, illuminated the outside of his church with arc-lights like a music hall. He has provided an orchestra instead of an organ and illustrates his sermon with magic-lantern slides. Pretty young women in white gowns show the congregation to their seats, and every worshiper is provided with a picture post-card! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-

ha!" The Archdeacon's low laugh had something mellow and juicy about it. "That is a curious, and no doubt effective, form of service! But I hardly think it would succeed here. A post-card parson! Ha-ha! He is a great enthusiast, and calls the primitive Church methods 'the age of the tallow candle.' He says that we in England still pursue the tallow-candle policy, but that he intends to use electric light. Ha-ha-ha!"

The Bishop and Mr. Carey joined gently in the soft 'Ha-ha!' and helped themselves and the Archdeacon to more wine. Everton was very still; his face was pale, and the light in his eyes was cold as the flash of steel.

"After all,"--said Carey--"he's not so far wrong. It's absolutely necessary nowadays to attract the people by something new, and, if possible, 'sensational.' They are tired of plain Gospel preaching. I have often thought of asking Mrs. Nordstein to recite in my church. Some devotional piece, of course--'Rock of Ages' or 'Abide with me.' She would 'draw' immensely. (Holy Orders, pp. 362-363)

Three additional Protestant ministers--of a completely repulsive, hypocritical sort--have minor roles to play in Thelma, The Soul of Lillith, and The Treasure of Heaven. The Reverend Mr. Dyceworthy of Thelma, a Lutheran clergyman, conceives a flaming desire for the heroine, and, following an unsuccessful proposal of marriage, attempts an equally unsuccessful seduction. Likewise, the Reverend Francis Anstruther of The Soul of Lillith, who has never believed in a future state, resigns his living, and deserts his invalid wife and eight children for the wife of a neighbor with whom he has been carrying on a clandestine affair; and the Reverend Mr. Arbroath of The Treasure of Heaven, who is by far the worst of the lot and is described as one "of the most imperious 'High' Anglicans of the Church," having been caught by his feline wife slipping "from moral rectitude" with another woman, is deprived of his living but received "into the Church of Rome, with all his sins forgiven. . . ."8

⁸Marie Corelli, The Treasure of Heaven (New York, 1906), pp. 315-316.

Even as love seems to lead to faith in Miss Corelli's stories and perversions of love and faith appear in juxtaposition, so too love and faith themes frequently interpenetrate Marie Corelli's social motifs, such as her views on education, alcohol and the automobile, atheistic science, and high society. Among Miss Corelli's early popular works, The Mighty Atom (1896) and Boy (1900) readily display her narrow concept of a faulty education. Indeed, The Mighty Atom is one long diatribe on the subject of an atheistic, "cram" educational system which finds the puzzled ten-year old victim-hero, the son of an unloving, irreligious father who drives his wife into running off with another man, trying to determine where the First Cause came from, and, much to the delight of the unfavorable reviewers, otherwise representing that perplexing first atom as "just a thing like two cords knotted together."⁹ Professor Cadman-Gore, the boy's atheistic new tutor, who eventually comes to recognize that it is a crime to bring up a child without a faith, is here portrayed as assessing the abilities of his pupil Lionel Valliscourt:

The child of ten had learnt more facts of science and history, than he, in his time, had known when he was twenty. He concealed his surprise however, under the cover of inflexible austerity, and the more apt of comprehension Lionel proved himself to be, the more the eminent pedagogue's professional interest became excited, and the more he determined to work such promising material hard. This is often the fate of brilliant and intelligent children,--the more quickly they learn, the more cruelly they are 'crammed,' till both heart and brain give way under the unnatural effort and forced impetus, and disaster follows disaster, ending in the wreck of the whole intellectual and physical organisation. Happy, in these days of vaunted progress, is the dull heavy boy who cannot learn,--who tumbles asleep over his

⁹Marie Corelli, The Mighty Atom (London, 1906), p. 157.

books, and gets a caning, which is far better than a 'cramming;--who is 'plucked' in his exams, and dubbed 'dunce' for his pains;--the chances are ten to one, that though he be put to scorn by the showy college pupil loaded with honours, he will, in the long run, prove the better, aye, and the cleverer man of the two. The young truant whom Mother Nature coaxes out into the woods and fields when he should be at his books,--who laughs with a naughty recklessness at the gods of Greece, and has an innate sense of the uselessness of learning dead languages which he is never to speak, is probably the very destined man who, in time of battle, will prove himself a hero of the first rank, or who, planted solitary in an unexplored country, will become one of the leading pioneers of modern progress and discovery. Over-study is fatal to originality of character; and both clearness of brain and strength of physique are denied to the victims of 'cram.' Professor Cadman-Gore was an advocate of 'cramming;--he was esteemed in many quarters as the best 'coach' of the day, and he apparently considered a young human brain as a sort of expanding bag or hold-all, to be filled with various bulky articles of knowledge, useful or otherwise, till it showed signs of bursting,--then it was to be promptly strapped together, locked and labelled--'Registered Through Passenger for Life.' If the lock broke and the whole bag gave way, why then so much the worse for the bag,--it was proved to be of bad material and its bursting was not the Professor's fault. (The Mighty Atom, pp. 148-149)

The sudden suicide of little Lionel Valliscourt proves to be a happily fortuitous event, however, compared with the gradual disintegration suffered by Boy, who is allowed to grow up under the supervision, or lack of it, of an alcoholic father and a dowdy, selfish mother, who uses her unloved child as a pacifier of her husband's attacks of delirium tremens. As a youth, Boy's life takes, if possible, an even more dreadful turn when his mother begins his total ruination by sending him for a year to a French school where he learns that the chief object of living is to please one's self. The seeds of

cynicism are further planted during this time, and nourished in the later years spent in an English military school:

. . . one could believe in God as long as one wished to,-- but when this same God did not arrange things as suited one's Self, then let God go. And Boy took this lesson well to heart,--it coloured and emphasized all the other "subjects" for which he "crammed" steadily, filling up his exam. papers and gaining thousands of marks for the parrot-like proficiency in such classical forms of study as were bound to be of no use whatever to him in the practical business of life. He was training to be an officer,--and in consequence of this was learning precisely everything an officer need not know. But as this is too frequently the system of national education nowadays in all professions, particularly the military, the least said about it the better. Boy, like other boys, did just what he was ordered to do, learned just what he was required to learn, with steady, dogged persistence but no enthusiasm, and spared no pains to grind himself down into the approved pattern of an English college boy, and for this he made a complete sacrifice of all his originality. (Boy, pp. 187-188)

After being expelled from Sandhurst for drunkenness and tricked by a dark, "bewitching siren" into losing money at a dishonest game of cards, Boy, in order to make good his losses, steals from his pious old aunt, and then, in a fit of remorse, enlists as a private in the Boer War in which he is killed--the victim of irresponsible parents and an educational pattern that shaped him "like a jelly in a cook's mould," that left no room in him "for the expansion of any new or bold form of disposition," and that checked in him all natural emotion, all enthusiasm, "and let all the wonders of the world and the events of time and history pass by" (Boy, pp. 288-289, 233).

By way of contrast, certain unaffected Corellian characters resist the influence of government schooling upon their children; while still other more

sophisticated types undoubtedly demonstrate the same kind of haphazard, private tutelage which Miss Corelli herself endured. Among the rebels, are Papa Patoux of The Master Christian, who has his children quietly and privately re-educated by the simple-hearted local priest in order to reverse the effects of the atheistic French national system of instruction which makes little children into "cynics before their time" (The Master Christian, p. 22); and "Feathery" Joltram, one of the English country folk of The Treasure of Heaven, whose first name is supposedly an adaptation of "father," and who circumvents his children's government education by making them forget everything they have learned once their schooldays are over:

"For it's all rort an' rubbish," he declared, in his broad, soft dialect. "I dozn't keer a tinker's baad 'apenny whether tha know 'ow to 'rite tha mixchief or to read it, or whether king o' England is eatin' 'umble pie to the U-nited States top man, or noa,--I keerz nawt aboot it, noben way or t'other. My boys 'as got to laarn draawin' crops out o' fields,--an' my gels must put 'and to milkin' and skimmin' cream an' makin' foinest butter as iver went to market. An' time comin' to wed, the boys 'ull take strong dairy wives, an' the gels 'ull pick men as can thraw through men's wurrk, or they'ze nay gels nor boys o' mine. Tarlk o' Great Britain! Heart alive! Wheer would th' owd country be if 'twere left to pulin' booky clerks what thinks they're gemmen, an' what weds niminy-piminy shop gels, an' breeds nowt but ricketty babes fit for workus' burial! Noa, by the Lord! No school larnin' for me nor mine, thank-ee! Why, the marster of the Board School 'ere doant know more practical business o' life than a suckin' calf! With a bit o' garden ground to 'is cot, e' doant reckon 'ow to till it, an' that's the rakelness o' book larnin'." (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 90)

Among the self-educated or tutored-at-home group, are Ernest Winsleigh of Thelma, whose father Lord Winsleigh undertakes his son's education so that the latter will not be "ground down to one pattern" at a public school

(Thelma, p. 205); and the heroines Thelma, Mavis Clare of The Sorrows of Satan, Lotys of Temporal Power, Innocent, and Mary Deane of The Treasure of Heaven, whose dead father saved every shilling until he had purchased editions of "Shakespeare and Carlyle, and Emerson and Scott and Dickens, and nearly all the poets" (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 213), and who, then, in the manner of Dr. Charles Mackay, made Mary read them to him. To be sure, Mary Deane, a wholesome country Marie Corelli, confesses:

. . . "I never learnt very much at school. I got the lessons into my head as long as I had to patter them off by heart like a parrot,--but the teachers were all so dull and prosy, and never took any real pains to explain things to me,--indeed, now when I come to think of it, I don't believe they could explain!--they needed teaching themselves. Anyhow, as soon as I came away I forgot everything but reading and writing and sums--and began to learn all over again with Dad." (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 213)

Besides the education motif, themes of love and faith also combine with other social motifs; excessive indulgence in alcohol and the brewing of poisonous beer, as well as the machine, especially the motor car, are topical themes belabored at length in Miss Corelli's novels. The evils of excessive indulgence in alcohol have already been touched upon in our discussion of Wormwood, a polemic against the absinthe drinking of the atheistic French, who have "a national taste for vice and indecent vulgarity which cannot be too sincerely and compassionately deplored" (Wormwood, p. v); Boy, wherein the father of Boy undergoes progressive alcoholic degeneration into a mindless, wimpering wretch; and Holy Orders, which depicts a whole English town at the mercy of a local brewery that is distilling adulterated beer. It

is, moreover, in the latter novel that a series of wildly improbable events are perpetrated by a number of tipplers. As a result of drinking adulterated liquor, therefore, an inebriated townsman Dan Kiernan beats his wife and then blames her death upon the clergyman's wife Azalea, who has inopportunistically informed the luckless woman that her husband has been having an affair with the lovely, godless, and likewise unsober, Jacynth. Sometime later, in a drunken rage, Kiernan murders Azalea, only to be killed himself as he lies stupidly in a road under the wheels of the speeding automobile of Jacynth, now the wife of a nasty, prominent Jewish millionaire. By another casual Corellian coincidence, Jacynth is lost at sea in a balloon piloted by a befuddled navigator who has a heart attack.

While motor-cars are denounced in God's Good Man as destroyers of innocent children and pets, the deadly combination of a speeding automobile and a drinking society dandy Reginald Wrotham, a "dissipated, effeminate-looking young man" with "a nose reddened by strong drink, and small lascivious eyes which glittered dully in his head like the eyes of a poisonous tropical beetle" (The Treasure of Heaven, pp. 139-140), are responsible for the death of the sole child of the poetic gypsy Tom o' the Gleam in The Treasure of Heaven. As usual, of course, Miss Corelli's justice is swiftly administered--this time by the little victim's father Tom o' the Gleam:

Down on the ground he [Tom] hurled him [Wrotham], clutching him round the neck, and choking every attempt at a cry. Then falling himself in all his huge height, breadth, and weight, upon Wrotham's prone body he crushed

it under and held it beneath him, while, with appalling swiftness and vehemence, he plunged a drawn claspknife deep in his victim's throat, hacking the flesh from left to right, from right to left with reckless ferocity, till the blood spurted about him in horrid crimson jets, and gushed in a dark pool on the floor.

.....
 As they wrenched the gypsy's grappling arms away, Wrotham fell back on the floor, stone dead. Life had been thrust out of him with the first blow dealt him by Tom's claspknife, which had been aimed at his throat as a butcher aims at the throat of a swine. His bleeding corpse presented a frightful spectacle, the head being nearly severed from the body. (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 148)

On the whole, while it is possible to understand Miss Corelli's defensive disapproval of a "cram" system of education, even though she herself seems to have been subjected to a system that was equally regimented in its own way, as well as her dislike of brewers--in part the result of her controversy with the brewer mayor of Stratford over Carnegie's Free Library--it is virtually impossible to reconcile her effusive utterances in her pastoral-like novels, God's Good Man, The Treasure of Heaven, Holy Orders, and Innocent, on the evils of the motor car in particular and the machine age in general with her ostensible support in the prophetic novels of the science of the future. Thus, on the one hand, the simple country life is extolled at the expense of advancing mechanization. In The Treasure of Heaven, for example, a group of farm folk discuss "the right of the road."

"The roads are made for the people, sure-ly!" said one of a group of men standing near the largest table in the room--
 "And the people 'as the right to 'xpect safety to life an' limb when they uses 'em."

"Well, the motors can put forward the same claim," retorted another. "Motor folks are people too, an' they can say, if they

likes, that if roads is made for people, they're made for them as well as t'others, and they expects to be safe on 'em with their motors at whatever pace they travels."

"Go 'long!" exclaimed the cattle-driver, who had before taken part in the discussion--"Aint we got to take cows an' sheep an' 'osses by the road? An' if a car comes along at the rate o' forty or fifty miles an hour, what's to be done wi' the animals? An' if they're not to be on the road, which way is they to be took?"

"Them motors ought to have roads o' their own like the railways," said a quiet-looking grey-haired man, who was the carrier of the district. "When the steam-engine was invented it wasn't allowed to go tearin' along the public highway. They 'ad to make roads for it, an' lay tracks, and they should do the same for motors, which is gettin' just as fast an' as dangerous as steam-engines."

"Yes, an' with makin' new roads an' layin' tracks, spoil the country for good an' all!" said the man in corduroys--"An' alter it so that there aint a bit o' peace or comfort left in the land! Level the hills an' cut down the trees--pull up the hedges an' scare away all the singin' birds, till the hull place looks like a football field!--all to please a few selfish rich men who'd be better dead than livin'! A fine thing for England that would be!" (The Treasure of Heaven, pp. 138-139)

And in Innocent farmer Jocelyn, who claims that "you may put a machine on the grass as much as you like, you'll never get the quality that you'll get with a well-curved blade and a man's arm and hand wielding it" (Innocent, p. 37), consequently ascribes the prosperity of his ancient, idyllic estate to his use of hand work only:

For despite the jeers of his neighbors, who were never tired of remonstrating with him for not "going with the times," Jocelyn had one fixed rule of farming, and this was that no modern machinery should be used on his lands. He was the best employer of labour for many and many a mile round, and the most generous as well as the most exact paymaster, and though people asserted that there was no reasonable explanation for it, nevertheless it annually happened that the hand-sown, hand-reaped crops of Briar Farm were finer and richer in grain and quality, and of much better value

than the machine-sown, machine-reaped crops of any other farm in the county or for that matter in the three counties adjoining. (Innocent, pp. 44-45)

On the other hand, the manifold splendors of science--or pseudo-science--are exalted throughout the psychic romances, but especially in The Young Diana and The Secret Power. In all of the prophetic novels, however, heroic men of science--often, of course, of the occult, religious variety--play major roles. Indeed, one of the unifying factors of these romances is Miss Corelli's prevailing utilization of the scientific, Chaldean monks of the star and cross, whose leader is an electrical physician in A Romance of Two Worlds before he becomes the monkish confidant and catalyst of Ardath and The Soul of Lilith. After his predicted death, he is replaced by still another mystical monk in The Life Everlasting. So too, in Barabbas, Melchior, one of the magi, acts as interpreter-seer of the drama of the Crucifixion and Resurrection; even as the occult physician of Ziska explains for the unbelieving characters of the novel--and doubtlessly for the equally unbelieving readers--the events of the story. Noted scientists and marvelous inventions likewise appear in The Soul of Lilith, in which the scientist dies before discerning the purpose of his invention; in The Young Diana, in which a futuristic scientist transforms the middle-aged heroine into a ravishing young beauty; and in The Secret Power, in which the mysterious scientist-heroine invents a wonderful flying machine as well as a destructive radium bomb.

Needless to say, the atheistic man of science, who also figures prominently in these novels, is suitably punished for his impious vanity. In The Soul of Lilith and The Secret Power the doubting scientists are maddened in consequence of their own diabolical investigations; in Ardath a professor of positivism of five-thousand years before Christ, who is dedicated to a "system of progressive learning, whereby human reason is trained and taught to pulverize into indistinguishable atoms all supernatural propositions, and to gradually eradicate from the mind the absurd notion of a Deity or deities, whom it is necessary to propitiate in order to live well," dies crushed in a volcanic eruption "under the ponderous fragment of a split column" (Ardath, pp. 270, 399); and the skeptical quack physician of The Life Everlasting, who scorns the efforts of the godlike scientist-hero, meets an even worse fate when he marries one of his querulous, but wealthy, hypochondriac patients, whose imaginary ills he has been fostering and with whom he leads a wretched life.

Again, Miss Corelli, who was an eminent social climber in her own day fond of displaying the recognition accorded her by royalty and other illustrious high society personages, evidences some inconsistency by the sometimes offhandedly casual--but more frequently embittered--manner with which she portrays upper class society in her novels. We have, of course, previously given ample indication of her views on society life and society people in our exemplifications of the fatal society woman, the new woman, and such sensual fops as Sir Francis Lennox in Thelma and Lord Reginald

Wrotham in The Treasure of Heaven. Actually, while it is almost impossible to read a romance by Marie Corelli that does not in some small way satirize a ruthless, godless upper class society, a few of Miss Corelli's lesser works such as the novelettes My Wonderful Wife and Jane (1897), as well as a number of the novels such as Thelma, Ardath, The Sorrows of Satan, The Murder of Delicia, Ziska, God's Good Man, The Treasure of Heaven, and Holy Orders, are devoted wholly or in part to an exposition of the follies of high society. Thus, when Jane Belmont, an elderly Marie Corelli of the "sweet-looking, placid-faced. . . purely old-fashioned type,"¹⁰ inherits a fortune and decides to make her debut, she discovers that her confidante, the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham, who "in a short tweed skirt with knickers" occasionally appears "sitting astride on a bicycle, her thick ankles and flat feet well exposed, and working at the machine she thus immodestly bestrode with the measured regularity of a convict working the treadmill" (Jane, pp. 57-58), has made Jane's own "palatial residence" the scene of a royal revelry which all but ignores the hostess. Jane, however, takes the initiative in dismissing Mrs. Maddenham and otherwise clearing the house of royalty and snobs and ruffians. As Jane herself angrily explains to Mrs. Maddenham:

¹⁰Marie Corelli, Jane (Philadelphia, 1897), p. 11.

. . . "I thought you were inviting a 'select' party of the noblest and best-bred men and women in England to meet the Royal guests,--you have got together the choicest collection of vulgarians ever found out of Thackeray's 'Book of Snobs.' I do not choose to entertain such persons a moment longer,--nor will I be treated as a stranger in my own household. I have let you have your full way because it amused me to do so; I wanted to see what sort of a woman you were,--what sort of a woman, in fact, is tolerated nowadays among the 'upper ten,' and I wanted to find out for myself what 'swagger' society is like. I have learnt the lesson by heart,--and a very ugly lesson it is. As I have already said, this house must be cleared and you must clear it. You brought Royalty here; you must take it away!"

"Take it away!" almost shrieked Mrs. Maddenham.--"Take Royalty away,--take it--"

"Yes," said Jane, "take it away! Represent to their Royal Highnesses that the mistress of this house is a very simple, old-fashioned woman who does not understand 'good' society,--who thought that they, in their exalted positions, would have invited, nay, commanded the presence of their hostess at supper, and that they would never have allowed themselves to be led into mistaking Mrs. Maddenham for Miss Belmont. Say to them that Miss Belmont had no desire to receive them here for the purpose of kneeling down and wiping the dust off their illustrious boots, nor for any other cause partaking of servility, toadyism, or self-interest,--but merely to do them honour with the poor best her house afforded. But that finding Royalty does not even inquire as to whether she exists or no, and also that many of the persons invited to meet Royalty are of a kind she does not herself care to be acquainted with, she humbly requests that her house may be relieved from the honour which has fallen upon it, and she herself left to her ordinary peace and privacy." (Jane, pp. 109-113)

Like the last book of Ardath, the second book of Thelma exhibits various scenes in which members of upper class society gossip, drink, engage in godless philosophical discussion, and debauch themselves--scenes upon which Miss Corelli characteristically comments:

Modern society contains within itself the seed of its own destruction--the most utter Nihilist that ever swore deadly oath need but contain his soul in patience and allow the seed to ripen. For God's justice is as a circle that slowly surrounds an evil and as slowly closes on it with crushing and resistless force--and feverish, fretting humanity, however nobly inspired, can do nothing either to hasten or retard the round, perfect, absolute and Divine Law. So let the babes of the world play on, and let us not frighten them with stories of earthquakes--they are miserable enough as it is, believe it!--their toys are so brittle, and snap in their feeble hands so easily, that one is inclined to pity them! And Awning Avenue, with its borrowed verdure and artificial light, is frequently erected for the use of some of the most wretched among the children of the earth--children who have trifled with and lost everything--love, honor, hope, and faith, and who are traveling rapidly to the grave with no consolation save a few handfuls of base coin, which they must, perforce, leave behind them at the last. (Thelma, p. 231)

Furthermore, in The Sorrows of Satan, Sibyl Elton, a godless society beauty, whose nuptial revelries are conducted by her husband's best friend Lucio Rimáñez--Lucifer in disguise--in later finding herself amorously in love with Lucio, symbolizes society offering itself to the devil. The elaborate celebration accompanying Sibyl's marriage is climaxed by eight tableaux in which Satan cynically appraises society--indeed, the first of the tableaux is entitled "Society":

An exquisite female figure, arrayed in evening-dress of the richest and most extravagant design, stood before us, her hair crowned with diamonds, and her bosom blazing with the same lustrous gems. Her head was slightly raised,--her lips parted in a languid smile,--in one hand she held up-lifted a glass of foaming champagne,--her gold-slippered foot trod on an hour-glass. Behind her, catching convulsively at the folds of her train, crouched another woman, in rags, pinched and wretched, with starvation depicted in her face,--a dead child lay near. And,

overshadowing this group, were two Supernatural shapes,-- one in scarlet, the other in black,--vast and almost beyond the stature of humanity,--the scarlet figure represented Anarchy, and its blood-red fingers were advanced to clutch the diamond crown from 'Society's' brow,--the sable-robed form was Death, and even as we looked, it slowly raised its steely dart in act to strike. The effect was weird and wonderful,--and the grim lesson the picture conveyed was startling enough to make a very visible impression. No one spoke,--no one applauded,--but people moved restlessly and fidgeted on their seats,--and there was an audible sigh of relief as the curtain closed. (The Sorrows of Satan, pp. 267-268)

At the conclusion of the novel, after the hero has lost his wealth and, to be sure, the accompanying influence of Satan, he sees Lucio once more as a part of a little drama which, in its social and political implications, resembles the satire in Temporal Power on the royal family of Edward VII and the government:

At last, just as 'Big Ben' chimed the quarter to eleven, one man whom I instantly recognized as a well-known Cabinet minister came walking briskly towards the House, . . . then, and then only, He whom I had known as Lucio, advanced smiling. Greeting the minister cordially, in that musical rich voice I knew of old, he took his arm,--and they both walked on, talking earnestly. I watched them till their figures receded in the moonlight, . . . the one tall, kingly and commanding, . . . the other burly and broad and self-assertive in demeanour;--I saw them ascend the steps, and finally disappear within the House of England's Imperial Government,--Devil and Man,--together! (The Sorrows of Satan, p. 471)

In the same manner, the affluent Englishmen abroad, who, since they are infected "by strange maladies of the blood and nerves, to which even scientific physicians find it hard to give suitable names," leave their homeland "on the plea of being unable to stand the cheery, frosty, and in

every respect healthy winter of their native country,"¹¹ are ridiculed in Ziska. And, like Jane, who withdraws from society to a life of simple rustic ease, the millionaire hero of The Treasure of Heaven David Helmsley exchanges his social position and his worldly treasure for "the treasure of heaven"--love in a rural cottage "covered from basement to roof with clambering plants and flowers" (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 217). He escapes from a "swart and grim" London that is extensively sketched by Miss Corelli:

There had been a Court at Buckingham Palace,--and a "special" performance at the Opera,--and on account of these two functions, entertainments were going on at almost every fashionable house in every fashionable quarter. The public restaurants were crammed with luxury-loving men and women,--men and women to whom the mere suggestion of a quiet dinner in their own homes would have acted as a menace of infinite boredom,--and these gilded and refined eating-houses were now beginning to shoot forth their bundles of well-dressed, well-fed folk into the many and various conveyances waiting to receive them. There was a good deal of needless shouting, and much banter between drivers and policemen. Now and again the melancholy whine of a beggar's plea struck a discordant note through the smooth-toned compliments and farewells of hosts and their departing guests. No hint of pause or repose was offered in the ever-changing scene of uneasy and impetuous excitation of movement, save where, far up in the clear depths of space, the glittering star-battalions of a wronged and forgotten God held their steadfast watch and kept their hourly chronicle. London with its brilliant "season" seemed the only living fact worth recognising; London, with its flaring noisy streets, and its hot summer haze interposed like a grey veil between itself and the higher vision. Enough for most people it was to see the veil,--beyond it the view is always too vast and illimitable for the little vanities of ordinary mortals. (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 2)

¹¹Marie Corelli, Ziska (New York, 1897), p. 14.

While Miss Corelli's unfavorable opinions on fashionable society are echoed throughout her works, she is never more Victorian than when speaking anonymously as the author of The Silver Domino, in the third chapter of which she condemns in masculine guise gambling, bad manners, excessive jewelry in women's dress, lack of courtesy, the vulgar use by women of the word ripping, and confidently concludes that "candour is part of my composition," after detailing some unfortunate incidents supposedly illustrative of the lack of delicacy of speech that men betray in their conversation before women:

At a supper-party given by one of the most exalted of noble dames not long ago, I heard a brute detailing the ins and outs of his "liver" trouble to an embarrassed looking young woman of about eighteen. As for the ugly word "stomach," it is commonly used in various circles of the beau-monde, and the most revolting details of medicine and surgery are frequently dealt with in what used to be termed "polite conversation."

.....
 I remember hearing the editor of a well-known magazine talk with a pretty young unmarried woman concerning the possibilities of her sex in Art, and after the utterance of many foolish platitudes, he brought his remarks to a brusque conclusion with the following words: "Oh yes, I admire gifted women, but, after all, their genius is bound to be interfered with and marred by the bearing of children." Coarse ruffian as he was, I suppose the surprised, hot blush that stained the poor girl's face was agreeable to his low little soul, while I, for my part, yearned to knock him down. (The Silver Domino, pp. 48-49)

In her dogmatic, prejudiced castigation of formal education, brewers, the machine age, and upper class society, Marie Corelli brought down upon herself the justifiable reproach of the critics--reproach that only intensified her campaign against these favorite targets, as well as against the journals and journalists themselves; for vitriolic as she can seem

otherwise, Marie Corelli is always at her most caustic when she is engaged in her pet crusade against reviewers in particular and journalists in general--a crusade which likewise extends from her very early to her very late novels. Since Miss Corelli was never satisfied with mixed reviews of her own books--or even moderately warm ones--she takes every opportunity to reveal the underhanded tactics of the publishing trade that she felt were solely responsible for her failure to be recognized as Shakespeare's nineteenth-century successor. At first her criticism is rather vague and collective as indicated by the remarks of Beau Lovelace, the genial author of Thelma, who sarcastically identifies one of his reviewers:

"That's Whipper," he explained with a smile, when the gentleman was out of ear-shot. "The best and most generous of men! He's a critic--all critics are large-minded and generous, we know--but he happens to be remarkably so. He did me the kindest turn I ever had in my life. When my first book came out, he fell upon it, tooth and claw, mangled it, tore it to ribbons, metaphorically speaking, and waved the fragments mockingly in the eyes of the public. From that day my name was made--my writings sold off with delightful rapidity, and words can never tell how I blessed, and how I still bless, Whipper. He always pitches into me--that's what's so good of him." (Thelma, p. 366)

And just to particularize her cyclic theory of history Miss Corelli sets forth in Ardath another critic of five-thousand years before Christ, Zabâstes, a wrinkled, little old man with a "fixed malign smile, like the smile of a mocking Greek mask," "beady black eyes," a "large hooked nose," and "thin wispy gray locks," whose task as a hired reviewer is described by the perverse poet who employs him:

"Yes, he is my paid critic--paid to rail against me on all occasions public or private, for the merriment of those who care to listen to the mutterings of his discontent; and, by the sacred veil! I cannot choose but laugh myself whenever I think of him! He deems his words carry weight with the people; alas, poor soul! his scorn but adds to my glory, his derision to my fame! Nay, of a truth I need him, even as the king needs the court fool, to make mirth for me in vacant moments, for there is something grotesque in the contemplation of his cankered clownishness, that sees nought in life but the eating, the sleeping, the building, and the bargaining. Such men as he can never bear to know that there are others, gifted by heaven, for whom all common things take radiant shape and meaning; for whom the flowers reveal their fragrant secrets; for whom birds not only sing, but speak in most melodious utterance; for whose dreamy eyes the very sunbeams spin bright fantasies in mid-air more lasting than the kingdoms of the world!" (Ardath, p. 125)

And undoubtedly Zabastes has his modern counterpart in Ardath in the new woman critic "Tiger-Lily," who has "a long, narrow face, cold, pale, arrogant eyes, a nose inclined to redness at the tip, and a thin, close-set mouth, lined with little sarcastic wrinkles," and who walks "with the stride of a dragoon and the demeanor of a police-inspector" (Ardath, p. 473).

In 1895, after the publication of Barabbas, Miss Corelli's annoyance with the critics culminated in her petty outbreak against them in her article in The Idler,¹² and as she became more desperate in her efforts to achieve literary stature, her attacks upon the critics in her novels grew more severe and more specific as well, so that in The Sorrows of Satan--one of many books not issued to the press for review--while the hero-author manages

¹²See above, p. 17.

to get good reviews by paying-off the critics, the heroine-author Mavis Clare must content herself with naming pigeons and owls after her disparaging reviewers:

"Here are my reviewers!" she said laughing. "Are they not pretty creatures? The ones I know best are named after their respective journals,--there are plenty of anonymous ones of course, who flock in with the rest. Here, for instance, is the 'Saturday Review,'" and she picked up a strutting bird with coral-tinted feet, who seemed to rather like the attention shown to him. "He fights with all his companions and drives them away from the food whenever he can. He is such a quarrelsome creature!"--here she stroked the bird's head. "You never know how to please him,--he takes offence at the corn sometimes, and will only eat peas, or vice versa. He quite deserves his name.--Go away, old boy!" and she flung the pigeon in the air and watched it soaring up and down. "He is such a comical old grumbler! There is the 'Speaker,'" and she pointed to a fat fussy fantail. "He struts very well, and fancies he's important, you know, but he isn't. Over there is 'Public Opinion,'--that one half-asleep on the wall; next to him is the 'Spectator,'--you see he has two rings round his eyes like spectacles. That brown creature with the fluffy wings all by himself on that flower-pot is the 'Nineteenth Century,' the little bird with the green neck is the 'Westminster Gazette,' and the fat one sitting on the platform of the cote is the 'Pall-Mall.' He knows his name very well--see!" and she called merrily--"Pall-Mall! Come boy!--come here!" The bird obeyed at once, and flying down from the cote, settled on her shoulder. "There are so many others,--it is difficult to distinguish them sometimes," she continued. "Whenever I get a bad review I name a pigeon,--it amuses me. That drabble-tailed one with the muddy feet is the 'Sketch'--he is not at all a well-bred bird I must tell you!--that smart-looking dove with the purple breast is the 'Graphic,' and that bland old grey thing is the 'I. L. N.' short for 'Illustrated London News.' Those three white ones are respectively 'Daily Telegraph,' 'Morning Post,' and 'Standard.' Now see them all!" and taking a covered basket from a corner she began to scatter corn and peas and various grains in lavish quantities all over the court. For a moment we could

scarcely see the sky, so thickly the birds flocked together, struggling, fighting, swooping downwards, and soaring upwards,--but the winged confusion soon gave place to something like order when they were all on the ground, and busy selecting their respective favourite foods from the different sorts provided for their choice.

.....
 With laughter still lurking in her blue eyes, she took us out of the pigeon-court, and led the way round to a sequestered and shady corner of the garden, where, in a large aviary-cage fitted up for its special convenience, sat a solemn white owl. The instant it perceived us, it became angry, and ruffling up its downy feathers, rolled its glistening yellow eyes vindictively and opened its beak. Two smaller owls sat in the background, pressed close together,--one grey, the other brown.

"Cross old boy!" said Mavis, addressing the spiteful-looking creature in the sweetest of accents. "Haven't you found any mice to kill to-day? Oh, what wicked eyes!--what a snappy mouth!" Then turning to us, she went on--"Isn't he a lovely owl? Doesn't he look wise?--but as a matter of fact he's just as stupid as ever he can be. That is why I call him the 'Athenaeum'! He looks so profound, you'd fancy he knows everything,--but he really thinks of nothing but killing mice all the time,--which limits his intelligence considerably!"
 (The Sorrows of Satan, pp. 227-229)

In her next novel, The Murder of Delicia, Miss Corelli continued her attack upon the press by representing as a minor villain the Bohemian poet Aubrey Grovelyn--a dirty-looking man, whose "abundant locks irresistibly reminded one of a black goat-skin door-mat, worn in places where reckless visitors had wiped their muddy boots thereon,"¹³ and who writes his own reviews under the name of Alfred Brown. We first meet him writing, as usual, about himself

"If Shelley was a poet, if Byron was a poet, if we own Shakespeare as a king of bards and dramatists, then Mr Aubrey Grovelyn is a poet also, eminently fitted to be the comrade

¹³Marie Corelli, The Murder of Delicia (London, 1896), p. 91.

of these immortals. Inspired thought, beauty of diction, ease and splendour of rhythm distinguish Aubrey Grovelyn's muse as they distinguish Shakespeare's utterances; and in bestowing upon this gifted singer the praise that is justly due to him, we feel we are rendering a service to England in being among the first to point out the glorious promise and value of a genius who is destined to outsoar all his contemporaries in far-reaching originality and grandeur of design."

Finishing this with a bold dash, he put it in an envelope and addressed it to the office of the journal on which he was employed and known, simply as Alfred Brown. Mr Alfred Brown was on the staff of that journal as a critic; and as Brown he praised himself in the person of Aubrey Grovelyn. The great editor of the journal, being half his time away shooting, golfing, or otherwise amusing himself, didn't care. And the public, seeing Grovelyn described as a Shakespeare, promptly concluded he must be a humbug, and avoided his books as cautiously as though they had been labelled 'Poison.' Hence Brown - Aubrey - Grovelyn's chronic yellow melancholy--his poems wouldn't 'sell.' (The Murder of Delicia, pp. 92-93)

In her later novels, Marie Corelli directs her invective against other journalistic practices, as demonstrated by her unsympathetic portrait of "a certain Jew named David Jost" in Temporal Power--Jews, like Frenchmen, were always suspect with Miss Corelli--"the sole proprietor of the most influential newspaper in the kingdom, and the largest shareholder in three other newspaper companies, all apparently differing in party views, but all in reality working into the same hands, and for the same ends" (Temporal Power, p. 184). In his lengthy criticism of Temporal Power in the September, 1902, issue of The Review of Reviews, W. T. Stead notes that the alien journalist Jost is described "in terms which fit more or less loosely

to one or two proprietors of journals of very large circulations in London town."¹⁴ Miss Corelli's vociferous, ineffectual denials that her book held any reference to any living person were probably made partly to avoid suits for libel, since her initial account of just this one character, Jost, barely allows us a glimpse behind the villainy that he gradually unmasks in the progress of the plot:

Jost and his companies virtually governed the Press; and what was euphoniously termed 'public opinion' was the opinion of Jost. Should anything by chance happen to get into his own special journal, or into any of the other journals connected with Jost, which Jost did not approve of, or which might be damaging to Jost's social or financial interests, the editor in charge was severely censured; if the fault occurred again he was promptly dismissed. 'Public opinion' had to be formed on Jost's humour; otherwise it was no opinion at all. A few other newspapers led a precarious existence in offering a daily feeble opposition to Jost; but they had not cash enough to carry on the quarrel. Jost secured all the advertisers, and as a natural consequence of this, could well afford to be the 'voice of the people' ad libitum. He was immensely wealthy, openly vicious, and utterly unscrupulous; and made brilliant speculative 'deals' in the unsuspecting natures of those who were led by that bland and cheery demeanour which is generally associated with a large paunch, to consider him a 'good fellow' with his 'heart in the right place.' With regard to this last assertion, it may be doubted whether he had a heart at all, in any place, right or wrong. He was certainly not given to sentiment. He had married for money, and his wife had died in a mad-house. He was now anxious to marry again for position; and while looking round the market for a sufficiently perfect person of high-breeding, he patronized the theatre largely, and 'protected' several ballet-girls and actresses. Everyone knew that his like was black with

¹⁴W. T. Stead, "Marie Corelli's New Novel," pp. 312-316.

villainy and intrigue of the most shameless kind, yet everyone swore that he was a good man. Such is the value of a limitless money-bag! (Temporal Power, pp. 184-185)

And, similarly, a penniless young novelist in The Treasure of Heaven explains his reasons for his dismissal from a London journal:

"As I tell you I was 'kicked off' out of journalism--my fault being that I published a leaderette exposing a mean 'deal' on the part of a certain city plutocrat. I didn't know the rascal had shares in the paper. But he had--under an 'alias.' And he made the devil's own row about it with the editor, who nearly died of it, being inclined to apoplexy--and between the two of them I was 'dropped.' Then the word ran along the press wires that I was an 'unsafe' man. I could not get any post worth having--I had saved just twenty pounds--so I took it all and walked away from London--literally walked away! I haven't spent a penny in other locomotion than my legs since I left Fleet Street." (The Treasure of Heaven, p. 233)

In assessing Miss Corelli's themes then, we find the usual combination of universality and topicality. While love--both human and divine--remains her most prominent theme and while she admittedly displays sexual love with only a little more daring than Dickens, she condemns godless sensual love or lack of love in man and woman in favor of her own idealized Victorian-Rosicrucian concepts. In the prophetic novels, love between man and woman often leads to love of God and faith in God; and two people destined to be soul-mates frequently will be drawn together by a powerful, first-glance mutual attraction which makes the union of the two souls an inevitability, if not for the present life, then for some future reincarnation. All of Miss Corelli's heroines value love about art; and many of her heroines--particularly those of the more realistic novels--are victimized by sensual, unappreciative, jealous men and parasitical parents, so that in her last

two prophetic novels, The Young Diana and The Secret Power, a seemingly embittered Marie Corelli can discover no one on this earth as a suitable companion for her spiritual heroines. In such idealized heroines as Thelma, Jane, and Mavis Clare of The Sorrows of Satan, Marie Corelli professes disdain for upper class society and the press, even pretending that the adverse comments of critics should be welcomed by an author as a certain indication of the eventual acceptance of a work in scholarly circles. In life, of course, a less than ideal Marie Corelli courted social favor and so exasperated her reviewers by her petty attacks upon them that most of the scholarly journals ceased to notice her new publications after 1910, especially since the motifs of her novels tended to remain somewhat the same and were worn thin with repetition by the First World War. In evaluating the worthless man versus the noble artist woman, the old-fashioned woman versus the new woman, and the evils of an atheistic "cram" educational system, alcohol, automobiles, atheistic science, irreligious upper class society, and journalism, Marie Corelli treats of problems that are generally peculiar to her age with a harshness which only occasionally admits of any humor. Yet at the same time, however, her criticism is in reality a moral one-- primarily her judgment on the weakness of man and but secondarily the weakness of an age.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Writing after the major work of the eighteenth-century novelists had been completed, Clara Reeve in The Progress of Romance, published in 1785, felt forced to distinguish between the prose romance, which she refers to as "an heroic fable which treats of fabulous persons and things," and which describes in lofty language "what never happened nor is likely to happen"; and the novel, which "gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes. . . and the perfection of it is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, as to make them appear so probable. . . (at least while we are reading) that all is real until we are affected by the joys and distresses, of the persons of the story, as if they were our own."¹ By the same token, writing in 1841, an anonymous critic of the Athenaeum attempted a similar and more elaborate differentiation--one that bears a close resemblance to the distinction which Sir Walter Scott makes in his earlier Essay on Romance (1824). According to this critic then, the novel is "a picture of daily life,--a reflex of human nature under the

¹Clara Reeve, The Progress of Romance (New York, 1930), p. 111.

modifications of an actual state of society," which, "while it strives to arrest our attention by exciting sympathy and surprise, appeals to the observant and reasoning faculties also"; whereas the romance, on the contrary, by addressing itself to the imagination alone, "strives to paint man as a being of passion alone; its view of life is taken by the flare of torches; artificial lights and abrupt shadows--dazzling brilliancy and fathomless gloom--such are the laws of chiaroscuro, such the effects it loves to produce." Thus, he continues, "everything it presents is rendered wildly picturesque, mysteriously undefined, by the flickering glare which is thrown over the picture."²

Two contemporaries of Marie Corelli, however, Robert Louis Stevenson in "A Gossip on Romance" (1887) and George Saintsbury in The English Novel (1913), seem to argue that the romance and the novel--the story of incident and the story of character and motive--cannot be separated.³ In defending the novel of incident, Robert Louis Stevenson observes that, while the English seem to look down upon incident, it is romantic incident, not realism, which makes a story interesting. Romance, he insists, makes all things romantic and "does not refuse the most pedestrian realism."⁴ Not

²"Charles Chesterfield; or the Adventures of a Youth of Genius," Athenaeum, MDCCCXLI (September 25, 1841), 740.

³George Saintsbury, The English Novel (London, 1913), pp. 7-8.

⁴Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance," Memories and Portraits (New York, 1896), pp. 247-275.

surprisingly, we find Miss Corelli agreeing that romance is to be found in every situation--even in the most painful of realities; as one of her characters asks:

"And yet what is realism really?". . . "Does anybody know? It is supposed to be the actuality of every-day existence without any touch of romance or pathos to soften its frequently hideous commonplace, but the fact is, the commonplace is not the real. The highest flights of imagination in the human being fail to grasp the reality of the splendours everywhere surrounding him, and, viewed rightly, realism would become romance, and romance realism. We see a ragged woman in the streets picking up scraps for her daily food; that is what we may call realistic; but we are not looking at the actual woman after all! We cannot see her inner self, or form any certain comprehension of the possible romance or tragedy which that inner self has experienced or is experiencing. We see the outer appearance of the woman, but what of that? The realism of the suffering creature's hidden history lies beyond us--so far beyond us that it is called romance because it seems so impossible to fathom or understand." (Ardath, p. 462)

Although, therefore, Miss Corelli frequently speaks of herself as a romancist and her novels as romances, she clearly endeavors to combine the specters of the romance with the realities of the novel, since, as she repeatedly reiterates "the romances planned by the brain of the novelist or dramatist are poor in comparison with the romances of real life--life wrongly termed commonplace, but which, in fact, teems with tragedies as great and dark and soul-torturing as any devised by Sophocles or Shakespeare" (Vendetta!, "Preface"). Actually, only four of her novels utilize the word romance in their title or subtitle--A Romance of Two Worlds; The Sorrows of Satan, or The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire: A Romance; The Treasure of Heaven: A Romance of Riches; and The Life

Everlasting: A Reality of Romance. Of these, The Treasure of Heaven, which deals with commonplace, everyday affairs, could just as well be termed a novel; even as The Life Everlasting, with its clumsy subtitle A Reality of Romance, seems to strain too far towards depicting the "wildly picturesque" as natural and probable. Most of the other novels, however, often by virtue of their titles and subtitles, as well as their sensational material, which readily juxtaposes the "wildly picturesque" and the sordidly realistic, may be classified as romances according to the narrowest eighteenth-century conception--Vendetta!, or The Story of One Forgotten; Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self; Wormwood: A Drama of Paris; The Soul of Lilith; Barabbas: A Dream of the World's Tragedy; Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul; The Master Christian; Temporal Power: A Study in Supremacy; The Young Diana: An Experiment of the Future; and The Secret Power. And, while Miss Corelli calls Innocent: Her Fancy and His Fact "a novel," it exhibits like another of her compositions, Love and the Philosopher: A Study in Sentiment, in the fashion of Dickens's Hard Times, the folly of emphasizing reality at the expense of romance. In contrast, Miss Corelli definitely labels as novels some of her shorter works, such as My Wonderful Wife: A Study in Smoke; Jane: A Social Incident; Boy: A Sketch; The Murder of Delicia; and The Mighty Atom, as well as some of her longer stories, such as Thelma: A Norwegian Princess; Holy Orders: The Tragedy of a Quiet Life; and God's Good Man: A Simple Love Story--all tales which, although primarily religious and social in their intent, nevertheless contain numerous scenes testifying to the dominant strain of romantic incident in Miss Corelli's works.

In her passionate sincerity as a novelist of purpose, Marie Corelli imitates Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins in their use of preface and appendix to point the moral and document the facts on which the fiction is supposedly based. Indeed, the more fantastic the experience that she relates the more vehemently does Miss Corelli seem to protest that she is writing a romance of reality--for "nothing is more strange than truth--nothing, at times, more terrible" (Vendetta!, "Preface"). As we have already observed, she avows the truth of the events described in A Romance of Two Worlds in an "Introduction," "Prologue," and "Appendix," comprising some forty pages of that novel; and she concludes her thirty-five page "Prologue" to The Life Everlasting with the casual remark: "I am not the heroine of the tale-- though I have narrated it (more or less as told to me) in the first person singular, because it seemed to me simpler and more direct" (The Life Everlasting, pp. 33-34). Likewise, in her brief, one-paragraph "Preface" to Vendetta!, she in part asserts:

Lest those who read the following pages should deem this story at all improbable, it is perhaps necessary to say that its chief incidents are founded on an actual occurrence which took place in Naples during the last scathing visitation of the cholera in 1884. We know well enough, by the chronicle of daily journalism, that the infidelity of wives is, most unhappily, becoming common--far too common for the peace and good repute of society. Not so common is an outraged husband's vengeance--not often dare he take the law into his own hands--for in England, at least, such boldness on his part would doubtless be deemed a worse crime than that by which he personally is doomed to suffer. But in Italy things are on a different footing--the verbosity and red-tape of the law, and the hesitating verdict of special juries, are not there considered sufficiently efficacious to soothe a man's damaged

honor and ruined name. And thus--whether right or wrong--it often happens that strange and awful deeds are perpetrated--deeds of which the world in general hears nothing, and which, when brought to light at last, are received with surprise and incredulity. (Vendetta!, "Preface")

But in a lengthier "Introductory Note" to her Zola-like Wormwood, she is all modesty and blushing naiveté as she insists:

All I ask of my readers and critics is that they will kindly refrain from setting down my hero's opinions on men and things to me personally, . . .

.
I have nothing whatever to do with the wretched "Gaston Beauvais" beyond the portraiture of him in his own necessarily lurid colors;--while for the description of the low-class "bal masqué" in Paris, I am in a great measure indebted to a very respectable-looking English tourist, who by his dress was evidently of some religious persuasion, and whom I overheard talking to a younger man, on board a steamer going from Thun to Interlaken. It was evidently the worthy creature's first trip abroad,--he had visited the French capital, and he detailed to his friend, a very hilarious individual, certain of his most lively experiences there. I, sitting close by in a corner unobserved, listened with a good deal of surprise as well as amusement to his enthusiastic eulogy of the "can-can" as he had seen it danced in some peculiar haunt of questionable entertainment, and I took calm note thereof, for literary use hereafter. The most delicate feelings can hardly be ruffled by an honest (and pious) Britisher's raptures,--and as I have included these raptures in my story, I beg to tender my thanks to the unknown individual who so unconsciously furnished me with a glowing description of what I have never seen and never wish to see!

For the rest, my "drama" is a true phase of the modern life of Paris; one scene out of the countless tragedies that take place every day and everywhere in these our present times. There is no necessity to invent fables nowadays,--the fictionist need never torture his brain for stories either of adventure or spectral horror. Life itself as it is lived among ourselves in all countries, is so amazing, swift, varied, wonderful, terrible, ghastly, beautiful, dreadful, and, withal, so wildly inconsistent and changeful, that whosoever desires to write romances has only to closely and patiently observe men and women as they are, not as they seem,--and then take pen in hand and write the--TRUTH.
(Wormwood, pp. vi-vii)

Miss Corelli reaches the height of absurdity, however, when she claims in an "Introductory Note" that her extravagant tale of suspended animation and other world visitation, The Soul of Lilith, is "simply the account of a strange and daring experiment once actually attempted, . . . offered to those who are interested in the unseen 'possibilities' of the Hereafter, merely for what it is,--a single episode in the life of a man who voluntarily sacrificed his whole worldly career in a supreme effort to prove the apparently Unprovable" (The Soul of Lilith, "Introductory Note"). But, then, whether in her fiction or in her life, Miss Corelli was always stoutly to maintain that, as a divinely inspired missionary, her stories were merely reworked transcriptions of her own mystical experiences and visions or those of other individuals who had presumably taken her into their confidence.

In a number of novels, Miss Corelli eschews her usual windy testimony to the accuracy of the events which she is about to narrate in favor of a more purposeful--and perhaps personal--introductory comment. Among the more interesting of these statements are the brief dedication to The Master Christian: "To All Those Churches Who Quarrel In The Name of Christ"; the lengthier dedication to The Mighty Atom; and the "Author's Note" to God's Good Man, a novel which was satirized in a paper-backed volume, entitled God's Good Woman by Carie Morelli, that appeared a few months after Miss Corelli's work. Hence, the dedication to The Mighty Atom boldly, in four different sizes of type, declares its purpose:

To those self-styled 'progressivists' who by precept and example assist the infamous cause of education without religion and who, by promoting the idea, borrowed from French atheism, of denying to the children in board-schools and elsewhere, the knowledge and love of God, as the true foundation of noble living, are guilty of a worse crime than murder. (The Mighty Atom, introductory page)

While the "Author's Note" to God's Good Man ludicrously implores:

For all sins, whether of omission or non-omission, of construction or non-construction, of conformity or non-conformity, of crudity or complexity, of diffuseness or dullness, of expression or of method, of inception or conception, of sequence or sequel, of singularity or individuality,--likewise for all errors whether technical and pertaining to the printer, or literary and pertaining to the author, and for everything imaginable or unimaginable that may be found commendable or uncommendable, pleasing or displeasing, aggravating or satisfying in this humble love-story for which no man will be the wiser and no woman the worse,

GENTLE REVIEWER, BE MERCIFUL UNTO ME!

And,

From wilful misquotations,--from sentences garbled, and randomly set forth to the public without context, continuation or conclusion, in attempt to do injury to both the story and its writer,--from the novel-skimmer's epitome, abridgment, synopsis or running commentary,--and from the objective analysis of Literary-Clique 'stylists,' and other distinguished persons, who, by reason of their superior intellectuality to all the rest of the world, are always able, and more than ready, to condemn a book without reading it,

MAY AN HONEST PRESS DELIVER ME! (God's Good Man, "Author's Note")

In ironic contrast to Miss Corelli's garrulity, the "Author's Note" to God's Good Woman reads simply:

Deliver me from all those superior persons who are unable to grasp the deep beauty and pathos of this, "the most popular book of the century."⁵

⁵ Cited by Bigland, p. 215.

As we have seen, the didactic commentaries of Miss Corelli's introductions at least provide suitable warning of the content of her novels, wherein, in spite of a Victorian critical tradition opposed to moral exhortation in the novel,⁶ both the author and her characters assume the functions of a clergyman. Actually, Miss Corelli earned the praise of her earlier critics for the avowed moral purpose of her novels. Thus, the anonymous reviewer of The Spectator happily announces that Ardath "obviously professes to have a high ethical and spiritual end";⁷ and similarly notes in his critique of Vendetta:

. . . the teaching in Vendetta--apart from the questionable pursuit of an object of revenge--is high and excellent. No vicious person can read it without a sense of shame; no virtuous person can read it without acquiring fresh strength and resolution. It is full of interest, and abounds in merit as a work of literary art; but we think it has also a distinct moral value of great and peculiar importance at the present time.⁸

Likewise, in writing of Wormwood, the Athenaeum concludes:

There is no degree of baseness and fury to which a nature abandoned to the slavery of drink is not capable of sinking. To overdraw the picture is impossible; the only question that need be asked is whether the painter has drawn it out of proportion, or in colours that distort the truth. What Marie Corelli has done--and it was necessary for the coherence and interest of the story--is to bring together

⁶Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870 (New York, 1959), pp. 66-67.

⁷"Ardath," The Spectator, LXIII (July 13, 1889), 49-51.

⁸"A Story of Vengeance," The Spectator, LIX (November 27, 1886), 1592-1593.

into the life of one man a sequence of events such as are constantly happening to different people. The effects of love, lawless passion, jealousy, hatred, insanity--all are grouped together round the lost absintheur whom the author has depicted.⁹

Other critics, however, deplored the fact that Miss Corelli used her novels as "only an excuse for a dissertation"¹⁰ and consequently let "herself go with a vengeance all over the shop."¹¹ William T. Stead calls The Sorrows of Satan "a great book by a little woman" from which the author should "cut out every word that relates to reviews, reviewers, and other women novelists,"¹² and he complains that The Master Christian, "a tolerably daring conception," degenerates into a sermon--a "screamy shriek" on marriage "or the reluctance of men to appreciate women."¹³

In addition to her powers as a preacher and teacher, Miss Corelli exhibits throughout her novels, in the manner of a true romancist, her rather doubtful talents as a lyrical poet--talents which, nevertheless, are far superior to the poetic abilities of her half-brother Eric Mackay, whose poetry is cited and commended in the early romances. The lyrical interludes of Miss Corelli's stories primarily treat of love, as symbolized by flowers,

⁹"Wormwood," Athenaeum, XCVI (November 15, 1890), 661.

¹⁰"Marie Corelli's New Novel," Literary Digest, XLIII (October 21, 1911), 690.

¹¹W. T. Stead, "The Sorrows of Satan--and of Marie Corelli," pp. 453-464.

¹²Ibid.

¹³W. T. Stead, "The Master Christian," pp. 291-292.

birds, stars, waves, and ships; are unelaborately structured; and frequently utilize a refrain. These poems, as well as her other published and unpublished lyrics--all masterpieces of faded romantic sentiment--comprise the edition of Poems edited by Bertha Vyver and published in 1926.

Although, therefore, Miss Corelli informs us, "My judgment of fine poetry was well nigh unerring, though no one had ever guided my taste or told me what I ought perforce to admire,"¹⁴ at her own poetic worst she is very bad indeed, as indicated by her "Rhyme of the Lotus-Lily"--a song which appears prominently in Ziska:

Oh for the passionless peace of the Lotus-Lily!
It floats in a waking dream on the waters chilly,
With its leaves unfurled
To the wondering world,
Knowing naught of the sorrow and restless pain
That burns and tortures the human brain;
Oh for the passionless peace of the Lotus-Lily!

Oh for the pure cold heart of the Lotus-Lily!
Bared to the moon in the waters dark and chilly.
A star above
Is its only love,
And one brief sigh of its scented breath
Is all it will ever know of Death;
Oh, for the pure cold heart of the Lotus-Lily!
(Ziska, pp. 169, 207-208; also in Poems, p. 84)

Another poem entitled "Sailing" from The Life Everlasting is remarkable only for its unpleasant approximate rhymes on whither and together:

Sailing, sailing! Whither?
What path of the flashing sea
Seems best for you and me?
No matter the way,

¹⁴Vyver, p. 27.

By night or day,
So long as we sail together!

Sailing, sailing! Whither?
Into the rosy grace
Of the sun's deep setting-place?
We need not know
How far we go,
So long as we sail together!

Sailing, sailing! Whither?
To the glittering rainbow strand
Of Love's enchanted land?
We ask not where,
In earth or air,
So long as we sail together!

Sailing, sailing! Whither?
On to the life divine!--
Your soul made one with mine,
In Heaven or Hell,
All must be well,
So long as we sail together!

(The Life Everlasting, p. 260; also in Poems, pp. 50-51)

But Miss Corelli is never as cloying as Eric Mackay, identified only as "the sweetest of our English poets," whose stanzas on a swallow cited in The Mighty Atom exemplify numerous such excerpts:

From out the roseate cloud, athwart the blue,
I hear thee sound anew
That song of thine a-shimmering down the sky,
And daisies, touched thereby,
Look up to thee in tears which men mistake for dew.

I see thee clip the air, and rush and reel,
As if excess of zeal
Had giddied thee in thy chromatic joys;--
And overhead dost poise
With outstretched wings of love, that bless while they appeal.

Thou hast within thy throat a peal of bells,
Dear dainty fare-thee-wells!--

And like a flame dost leap from cloud to cloud:--
 Is't this that makes thee proud?
 Or is't that nest of thine, deep-hidden in the dells?
 (Cited in The Mighty Atom, pp. 176-177)

At this point, it is but fair to concede that some of Miss Corelli's poems do evidence a certain power by virtue of a primitive sort of irony and a restful melody--although few of these better efforts are numbered, unfortunately, among the many lyrical interludes of her novels.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the fact that Richard Stang in The Theory of the Novel in England: 1850-1870 traces the use of point of view, or standing point as

¹⁵One such typical lyric, "Sorrow," reads:

I sought the friend of my youth,
 I came to the hills we had known,
 The place was the same,
 I called him by name,
 But my friend had flown.

And while I lamented his loss
 Another came to my side,
 And, clasping my hand,
 Walked slow through the land
 As my comrade and guide.

I asked for the stranger's name,
 And his looks were full of pain--
 "I am Sorrow," he said,
 "And till thou art dead
 I shall never leave thee again!"
 (Poems, p. 113)

it was sometimes called then, as far back as 1866,¹⁶ most of the critics of the 'sixties and 'seventies apparently thought of a plot in terms of the conventional devices of the melodrama--of "imported incident" rather than the working out of an initial situation springing from character.¹⁷ In short, for most Victorian novelists working in the middle of the period, as well as for such later Victorian novelists as Marie Corelli, character and action did not always need to be strictly related.¹⁸ As a result, when we mention structure and the Victorian novel together, we are likely to think of a diffuse Dickensian composition that rather defies any consideration according to pattern, rhythm, point of view, or any of the other inadequate expressions employed by the Jamesian critics to discuss form in the novel. So too, when we attempt to analyze the structure--or possibly lack of structure--of a Marie Corelli romance, we are often hampered by those peculiarities of form that we readily associate with the anomaly of the Victorian novel--an already rambling plot further impeded by unnecessary descriptions, characters and dialogue, and episodes. Still another difficulty that confronts us, moreover, is that, while some of the padding of the early two-decker and three-decker romances vanishes from her works published after 1906, nonetheless, the best of Miss Corelli's novels--with a few exceptions--were

¹⁶Richard Stang, pp. 107-111.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁸Ibid.

written from 1886 to 1896, and nearly all of them were published in the two-volume and three-volume format. In order to exemplify the structure of these novels, therefore, we have chosen to discuss three of her early books, which, in their similarities and differences, are fairly representative of her work. Two of these novels--Thelma (1887), a three-decker, and The Sorrows of Satan (1895), one of the first novels to appear in a single six-shilling volume--were among Miss Corelli's most popular romances; whereas the third Ardath (1889), a three-decker, despite a completely extraneous last chatty volume, was considered by its author--with some justification--her grandest conception. It is also interesting to observe that, in spite of Miss Corelli's quarrel with the critics, these early novels merited at least the moderate acclaim of a few of the more respected journals. Thus, the Athenaeum, in discussing Thelma, admits its "crudity" and "conventionality" of characterization, but approves of its denouement as "both interesting and pathetic."¹⁹ One of Miss Corelli's most critically accepted novels, if not one of her most popular, Ardath, is termed by the reviewer of the Athenaeum as "clever" but "by no means satisfactory"--a work which is "marked by sweet and tender fancies," and which, although it is "visionary in the extreme, . . . may commend itself to many readers as successful."²⁰ Ardath is more extravagantly praised, however, in a lengthy

¹⁹"Thelma," Athenaeum, XC (June 18, 1887), 796.

²⁰"Ardath," Athenaeum, XCIV (May 25, 1889), 660.

critique in The Spectator which finds it "a very powerful, very fascinating, very faulty, and very irritating romance," a work which is somewhat spoiled by the author's tendency to deal "damnation round the land." Nevertheless, "the chapters devoted to the fall of Al-Kyris have not often been equalled in English literature for wealth and splendour of lurid invention; some portions of Beckford's Vathek approach them most nearly; but even Vathek is deficient in some of the qualities which give to Ardath its peculiar impressiveness."²¹ And, in his long and perceptive treatments of The Sorrows of Satan, The Master Christian, and Temporal Power, William T. Stead, while indicating a preference for Temporal Power as "by far the strongest book she [Miss Corelli] had yet written,"²² terms those sections of The Sorrows of Satan in which Miss Corelli is not delineating her own sorrows "magnificent" and "likely to win an abiding place in the memory of man." But he concludes: "It is the supreme example of a popular style; the zenith attained by the Penny Dreadfuls in the last decade of the nineteenth century."²³

On the one hand, the three novels easily suggest Miss Corelli's enthusiasm for depicting a variety of settings--especially in places she had never seen. On the other hand, only occasionally, as in Thelma, is the

²¹"Ardath," The Spectator, LXIII (July 13, 1889), 49-51.

²²Cited by Bigland, p. 202; see also W. T. Stead, "Marie Corelli's New Novel," pp. 312-316.

²³W. T. Stead, "The Sorrows of Satan--and of Marie Corelli," pp. 453-464.

setting of any real importance; for the most part, the events that Miss Corelli narrates could just as well occur almost any other place than they do. The first volume of Thelma, however, is set in a remote section of Norway--a country which Miss Corelli had never visited but which she took such great pains to characterize that her readers, Norwegians included, somehow actually recognized it. A more unrealistic, poetic tale, Ardath, begins in a Caucasian monastery; continues in the Middle East, where Miss Corelli proceeds to enumerate a series of events that supposedly happened in the ancient city of Al-Kyris; and then, after numerous scenes in fashionable London, concludes, quite unnecessarily, with a marriage in the Cathedral of Cologne, a landmark much admired by Miss Corelli. The Sorrows of Satan, a story which combines the realism of Thelma with the unreality of Ardath, portrays a variety of settings in England; but terminates, after an episode in Egypt and a downpour of infernal visions amid ice-floes in the ocean, on board a ship in the mid-Atlantic. Often, in the style of a late eighteenth-century novelist, Miss Corelli, in order to detail the splendors of her settings, will resort to Radcliffian scene-painting. In the first book of Thelma, the atmosphere of lonely fjords and the strange beauties and dangers of a land lit solely by a midnight sun are conveyed by the colorful, if not prolonged, descriptive passages. The opening of the novel is indicative:

Midnight--without darkness, without stars! Midnight--and the unwearied sun stood, yet visible in the heavens, like a victorious king throned on a dais of royal purple bordered with gold. The sky above him--his canopy--gleamed with a cold yet lustrous blue, while across it slowly flitted a few wandering clouds of palest amber, deepening, as they sailed

along, to a tawny orange. A broad stream of light falling, as it were, from the center of the magnificent orb, shot lengthwise across the Alten Fjord, turning its waters to a mass of quivering and shifting color that alternated from bronze to copper--from copper to silver and azure. The surrounding hills glowed with a warm, deep violet tint, flecked here and there with touches of bright red, as though fairies were lighting tiny bonfires on their summits. Away in the distance a huge mass of rock stood out to view, its rugged lines transfigured into ethereal loveliness by a misty veil of tender rose pink--a hue curiously suggestive of some other and smaller sun that might have just set. Absolute silence prevailed. Not even the cry of a seagull or kittiwake broke the almost deathlike stillness--no breath of wind stirred a ripple on the glassy water. (Thelma, p. 3)

But perhaps more striking is another midnight sun that shines above Thelma's English lord, Sir Philip Bruce-Errington, and his friends, who are spending the night in the Norwegian hills:

Meanwhile the imperial sun rode majestically downward to the edge of the horizon--and the sky blushed into the pale tint of a wild rose, that deepened softly and steadily with an ever-increasing brilliance as the minutes glided noiselessly on to the enchanted midnight hour. A wind began to rustle mysteriously among the pines--then gradually growing wrathful, strove to whistle a loud defiance to the roar of the tumbling waters. Through the little nooks and crannies of the roughly constructed cabin where the travelers slept, it uttered small shrieks of warning or dismay--and, suddenly, as though touched by an invisible hand, Sir Philip awoke. A crimson glare streaming through the open door dazzled his drowsy eyes--was it a forest on fire? He started up in dreamy alarm--then he remembered where he was. Realizing that there must be an exceptionally fine sky to cast so ruddy a reflection on the ground, he threw on his cloak and went outside.

What a wondrous, almost unearthly scene greeted him! His first impulse was to shout aloud in sheer ecstasy--his next to stand silent in reverential awe. The great fall was no longer a sweeping flow of white foam--it had changed to a sparkling shower of rubies, as though some great geni, tired of his treasures, were flinging them away by giant handfuls in the most reckless haste and lavish abundance. From the bottom of

the cascade a crimson vapor arose, like smoke from flame, and the whirling rapids, deeply red for the most part, darkened here and there into an olive-green flecked with gold, while the spray, tossed high over interrupting rocks and boulders, glittered as it fell like small fragments of broken opal. The sky was of one dense uniform rose-color from west to east--soft and shimmering as a broad satin pavilion freshly unrolled--the sun was invisible, hidden behind the adjacent mountains, but his rays touched some peaks in the distance, on which white wreaths of snow lay, bringing them into near and sparkling prominence.

The whole landscape was transformed--the tall trees rustling and swaying in the now boisterous wind took all flickering tints of color on their trunks and leaves--the gray stones and pebbles turned to lumps of gold and heaps of diamonds, and on the other side of the rapids, a large tuft of heather in a cleft of the rocks glowed with extraordinary vividness and warmth like a suddenly kindled fire. A troop of witches dancing wildly on the sward--a ring of fairies--kelpies tripping from crag to crag--a sudden chorus of sweet voiced water-nymphs--nothing unreal or fantastical would have surprised Errington at that moment. Indeed, he almost expected something of the kind--the scene was so eminently fitted for it. (Thelma, pp. 181-182)

Yet, the beginning of Ardath is, if possible, even more garish, composed as it is in that high-flown, rhythmical prose-poetry which presumably also characterizes the elegant dialogue spoken by the inhabitants of the pagan

Al-Kyris:

Deep in the heart of the Caucasus mountains a wild storm was gathering. Drear shadows drooped and thickened above the Pass of Dariel, that terrific gorge which like a mere thread seems to hang between the toppling frost-bound heights above and the black abysmal depths below; clouds, fringed ominously with lurid green and white, drifted heavily yet swiftly across the jagged peaks where, looming largely out of the mist, the snow-capped crest of mount Kazbek rose coldly white against the darkness of the threatening sky. Night was approaching, though away to the west a broad gash of crimson, a seeming wound in the breast

of heaven, showed where the sun had set an hour since. Now and again the rising wind moaned sobbingly through the tall and spectral pines that, with knotted roots fast clenched in the reluctant earth, clung tenaciously to their stony vantage-ground; and mingling with its wailing murmur, there came a distant hoarse roaring as of tumbling torrents, while at far-off intervals could be heard the sweeping thud of an avalanche slipping from point to point on its disastrous way. Through the wreathing vapors the steep bare sides of the near mountains were pallidly visible, their icy pinnacles, like uplifted daggers, piercing with sharp glitter the density of the low-hanging haze, from which large drops of moisture began presently to ooze rather than fall. Gradually the wind increased, and soon with sudden fierce gusts shook the pine trees into shuddering anxiety; the red slit in the sky closed, and a gleam of forked lightning leaped athwart the driving darkness. An appalling crash of thunder followed almost instantaneously, its deep boom vibrating in sullenly grand echoes on all sides of the pass, and then, with a swirling, hissing rush of rain, the unbound hurricane burst forth alive and furious. On, on! splitting huge boughs and flinging them aside like straws, swelling the rivers into riotous floods that swept hither and thither, carrying with them masses of rock and stone and tons of loosened snow; on, on! with pitiless force and destructive haste, the tempest rolled, thundered, and shrieked its way through Dariel. As the night darkened and the clamor of the conflicting elements grew more sustained and violent, a sudden sweet sound floated softly through the turbulent air; the slow, measured tolling of a bell. To and fro, to and fro, the vesper-bell ringing in the Monastery of Lars far up among the crags crowning the ravine. There the wind roared and blustered its loudest; it whirled round and round the quaint castellated building, battering at the gates and moving their heavy iron hinges to a most dolorous groaning; it flung rattling hailstones at the narrow windows, and raged and howled at every corner and through every crevice; while snaky twists of lightning played threateningly over the tall iron cross that surmounted the roof, as though bent on striking it down and splitting open the firm old walls it guarded. All was war and tumult without, but within a tranquil peace prevailed, enhanced by the grave murmur of organ music; men's voices mingling together in mellow unison chanted the Magnificat, and the uplifted steady harmony of the grand old anthem rose triumphantly above the noise of the storm. (Ardath, pp. 13-14)

In Ardath, the most musically descriptive of Miss Corelli's novels, such stormy passages are so frequently encountered that the whole plot becomes taut with mystery, terror, and mysticism--a tension that Miss Corelli skillfully heightens and relaxes until the great crashing climax of the conclusion of the second book, after which she dutifully and wearily fills out a final anticlimactic book with lengthy, didactic discussions on critics, atheists, St. Paul, musicians, and spiritualists. The blank verse melodies of Ardath were never to be repeated by Miss Corelli--at least not with the same incessant regularity--in any of her succeeding romances; and The Sorrows of Satan, while admittedly considerably shorter than Ardath, is remarkably free from landscape painting, although it does indulge in description--and not always sparingly either--to underline the horror and diablerie of the tale.

As we have seen, both Robert Louis Stevenson and George Saintsbury distinguish, like their predecessors, between the romance, or the tale of imaginative incident, and the novel of character, presumably a more realistic work, although, at the same time, conceding the difficulty in making any steadfast separation between the two. In his lecture The Art of Fiction (1884), Sir Walter Besant, novelist and critic, makes a more formal and more organized approach than Stevenson or Saintsbury, to the problem of the analysis of form in the novel. Chiefly, he stresses the moral purpose of the novel over the pleasure purpose; since the novel gives ideas, strengthens faith, "preaches a higher morality than is seen in the actual world," and

commands the emotions of pity, admiration, and terror, it is a universal teacher.²⁴ Besant pauses, incidentally, to make clear that he considers the preaching novel the worst sort of fiction; and, having written his study two years before Miss Corelli's A Romance of Two Worlds, he can prematurely rejoice that the religious novel is out of fashion.²⁵ While he also emphasizes the importance of the human interest of the characters absolutely absorbing everything else in the novel, he is quick to add that, like Stevenson and Saintsbury, he prefers a novel with a "romantic and exciting story" as well--that is, he enjoys Hawthorne more than Howells.²⁶ Besant next applies two of Aristotle's dramatic rules to the novel as he points to the necessity of economy and selectivity through observation and experience in the composition of a work of fiction, and strikes out against modern writers who attach more significance to the style of a novel than to the story itself.²⁷ The story, he feels, is everything--no matter how many schools of fiction claim that there is no need for a story.²⁸ Again, as we can perceive, while he does not ignore good characterization, Besant definitely accentuates the plot as the primary concern of the novelist.

²⁴Sir Walter Besant, The Art of Fiction: A Lecture (New York, 1902), p. 19.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 58-59.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 67-68.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 59-65.

²⁸Ibid., p. 65.

Following from the various comments of her contemporaries--Besant, Stevenson, and Saintsbury--we find that most of Marie Corelli's fiction can be described in terms of the romance or the novel of incident. A more recent critic, Edwin Muir, belabors his own distinction between the novel of action and the novel of character in his well-known work The Structure of the Novel. According to his differentiations, the plot of a Marie Corelli novel is a somewhat unsatisfactory compromise between what Muir represents as a romance or a novel of action in which, as in stories of adventure and crime, the plot takes precedence over the characters, and a novel of character in which, as in picaresque tales, the plot is "designed to tell us more about the characters."²⁹ On the one hand, the plot of a novel of action must always be in agreement with our wishes, not our knowledge, insofar as it is characterized by the evocation of such emotions as anticipation, fear, apprehension, and the like; takes an irresponsible delight in vigorous events, thus implying a deviation from normal, civilized life; and, in the end, generally metes out death to certain of the subsidiary characters so that "the wicked will be slaughtered, and some of the good may safely be sacrificed, so long as the hero returns to peace and prosperity after his tumultuous vacation."³⁰ On the other hand, the novel of character utilizes

²⁹Edwin Muir, The Structure of the Novel (London, 1928), pp. 7-41.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 21-23.

typical situations and flat or static characters in order to paint a broad picture of life--to demonstrate "the contrast between appearance and reality, between people as they present themselves to society and as they are."³¹

Of Marie Corelli's longer novels, then, Thelma is easily the closest to being an acceptable novel of character in the sense of Muir's definition, although the extraordinary adventures suffered in the first book, "The Land of the Midnight Sun," both by the hero, Sir Philip Bruce-Errington, an English nobleman, and the heroine, Thelma, a simple Norwegian beauty with whom he falls in love, identify the work, at least in part, as a novel of action. As in all novels of character, a great number of personages figure in the melodramatic plot or plots, nearly all of whom, except for two spiteful women who unconvincingly come to repent their sins, are static. In the first book, Sir Philip Errington, accompanied by several Dickensian-like acquaintances, disembarks from his yacht in Norway, where he and his best friend George Lorimer fall in love with the mysterious girl Thelma, the daughter of Olaf Guldmar, a worshiper of Odin, who has his dead wife interred in a grotto that is guarded by a mad dwarf Sigurd, who possesses prophetic powers and who, since he also loves Thelma, tries to kill Errington. Thelma herself is menaced by two hags of the town with operatic names and personalities--Ulrika, who later discovers that she is the mother of Sigurd, whom she attempted to murder when he was but an infant; and Lovisa, who,

³¹Ibid., p. 47.

once having been spurned by Thelma's father, consequently accuses the girl of bewitching Britta, Thelma's faithful servant and Lovisa's granddaughter. Ulrika and Lovisa are in the employ of the even more fanatical temporary Lutheran minister of the town, the Reverend Mr. Charles Dyceworthy, who ostensibly objects to Thelma's Catholicism as much as old Guldmar's paganism, but who is in fact himself in love with Thelma and is really more annoyed by her impending marriage to Sir Philip. In the course of the action of the first book several crises are apparent--Sigurd kills himself; Thelma is cursed, attacked, and rescued in an emotional confrontation with the wicked women which concludes with Ulrika's asking forgiveness when she finds through the usual scar that Sigurd is her son; and one of Sir Philip's friends, Pierre Duprez, having overheard an interesting conversation between Thelma and the Reverend Mr. Dyceworthy--the overheard conversation seems to be the best way for a Marie Corelli character to acquire information--in which the Reverend Mr. Dyceworthy works himself up to seizing the object of his desire by force, rescues her just in time from this fate worse than death. In the second book, "The Land of Mockery," Thelma and her husband, after a honeymoon in Germany, finally establish their residence in fashionable London, much to the dismay of several society ladies who are disappointed that Thelma is not the clumsy, ignorant, country wench whom they had anticipated. Indeed, most disappointed of all is Lady Clara Winsleigh, who has herself been infatuated with Sir Philip, although she is already encumbered by a much neglected husband and son. At this point, Thelma becomes a novel of character as,

untainted by society, Thelma moves in and out of a scene blurred by the distorted masks worn by London's high society. First, there are the gentlemen:

Some of these are young fledglings of manhood--callow birds who, though by no means innocent--are more or less inexperienced--and who have fluttered hither to the snare of Lady Winsleigh's "at home," half expecting to be allowed to make love to their hostess, and so have something to boast of afterward--others are of the middle-aged complacent type who, though infinitely bored, have condescended to "look in" for ten minutes or so, to see if there are any pretty women worth the honor of their criticism--others again (and these are the most unfortunate) are the "nobodies"--or husbands, fathers, and brothers of "beauties," whom they have dutifully escorted to the scene of triumph, in which they, unlucky wights! are certainly not expected to share. A little desultory conversation goes on among these stair-loungers--conversation mingled with much dreary yawning--a trained opera-singer is shaking forth chromatic roulades and trills in the great drawing-room above--there is an incessant stream of people coming and going--there is the rustle of silk and satin--perfume shaken out of lace kerchiefs and bouquets oppresses the warm air--the heat is excessive--and there is a never-ending monotonous hum of voices, only broken at rare intervals by the "society laugh"--that unmeaning giggle on the part of the women--that strained "ha, ha, ha!" on the part of the men, which is but the faint ghostly echo of the farewell voice of true mirth.

Presently, out of the ladies' cloak-room come two fascinating figures--the one plump and matronly, with gray hair and a capacious neck glittering with diamonds--the other a slim girl in pale pink, with dark eyes and a ravishing complexion, for whom the lazy gentlemen on the stairs make immediate and respectful room.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Van Clupp?" says one of the loungers.

"Glad to see you, Miss Marcia!" says another, a sandy-haired young man, with a large gardenia in his button-hole and a glass in his eye.

At the sound of his voice Miss Marcia stops and regards him with a surprised smile. She is very pretty, is Marcia--bewitchingly pretty--and she has an air of demure grace and modesty about her that is perfectly charming. Why! oh, why does she not remain in that sylph-like attitude of questioning silence? But she speaks--and the charm is broken.

"Waal now! Dew tell!" she exclaims. "I thought yew were in Pa-ar--is! Ma, would yew have concluded to find Lord Algy here? This is too lovely! If I'd known yew were coming I'd have stopped at home--yes I would--that's so!"

And she nods her little head, crowned with its glossy braids of chestnut hair, in a very coquettish manner, while her mother, persistently beaming a stereotyped smile on all around her, begins to ascend the stairs, beckoning her daughter to follow. Marcia does so, and Lord Algernon Masherville escorts her.

"You--you didn't mean that?" he stammers rather feebly-- "You--you don't mind my being here, do you? I'm--I'm awfully glad to see you again, you know--and--er--all that sort of thing!" (Thelma, pp. 232-233)

Thelma's introduction to society comprises many incidents--all related with a didactic relish by the author--among which are Thelma's refusal to wear a décolleté gown to Lady Winsleigh's party; the evening of Lady Winsleigh's "crush" itself with its panoramic view of society; and Thelma's first visit to the Brilliant Theatre where the "Humming-Bird," Violet Vere, a vulgar new woman who eats scented bonbons to conceal her brandy breath, is performing. When the "Humming-Bird" turns out to be the runaway wife of Sir Philip's secretary, in unsuccessfully contriving to effect a secret reconciliation between the two, Sir Philip unwittingly allows appearances to suggest a relationship between himself and Violet Vere--a situation that is capitalized upon by Lady Winsleigh and her brutish friend Sir Francis Lennox, who finally amass seemingly irrefutable evidence to convince Thelma of her husband's faithlessness. After the climactic scene of the novel in which Thelma escapes from the importunate attentions of Sir Francis by way of a secret panel, she gains passage back to Norway, where she is pursued by her distraught husband, who has already happily witnessed the frightful death of

Sir Francis and the humiliation and repentance of Lady Winsleigh. Meanwhile, in a typically brief final book, "The Land of the Long Shadow," the dying Lovisa confesses to Thelma's father that she jealously crippled his wife in an attempt to kill her. While driving back to his country home in his sledge, Olaf meets with a visionary Valkyrie and an accident, and, in dying, he exacts from a friend a promise to give him a Viking funeral. The ill Thelma only returns to further disaster, therefore, and is herself delivered of a stillborn child--one of two babies ever born in Marie Corelli novels and a surprise to the reader and Thelma alike--but the heroine is nursed back to health by her husband, friends, and the reformed Ulrika. In the manner of a perfect Dickensian conclusion, then, the novel ends with everyone accounted for, as Marie Corelli sings the praises of love and accentuates her hymn with two weddings. Pierre Duprez marries Britta, and the faithful, uncomplaining, but somewhat aging George Lorimer marries another Thelma, the daughter of the heroine; characteristically, Violet Vere expires in a fit of delirium tremens, while, less typically, Lady Winsleigh and Ulrika are allowed to lead melancholy lives of remorse.

A very uneven work, Ardath, one of the prophetic romances, is clearly a novel of action--at least for the first two books "Saint and Sceptic" and "In Al-Kyris"--a novel in which many wonderful adventures befall the unbelieving poet-hero Theos Alwyn resulting in his conversion to faith. Like many women writers, Miss Corelli cannot depict men very convincingly; and the reader, wondering at the obtuseness and lack of consistency of the

supposedly perspicacious and famous hero, readily finds himself skipping over long batches of moralistic dialogue--again as in a Dickensian novel--in order to get to the rush of marvelous occurrences that will surely succeed--occurrences that we are asked to believe were especially arranged by heaven for the sole purpose of converting the doltish hero. In a short introductory book, then, Theos Alwyn comes to a Caucasian monastery to consult with its mystical Chaldean abbot Heliobas about the poet's failing inspiration. Heliobas, however, attributes the poet's loss of temperamental health to his agnosticism; and, after much discussion, Theos challenges the monk to reveal to him God and the angels, and is consequently plunged into a death-like trance in which he envisions the words to a new poem and, more spectacularly, an angel in a field of white flowers who speaks to him of her past love for him, as she urges him to seek out the field of Ardath. Having been informed by Heliobas that the field of Ardath is located, according to the Second Book of Esdras, one of the Apocryphal books of the Bible, on the site of the Babylonian ruins, the confused young doubter goes to the designated place where he does indeed once more meet his angel--this time in human form--who explains to him at length, like a wearisome Blessed Damsel, that she must be unhappy in heaven so long as death stands between them. Again, now on the field of Ardath flowers, the poet falls into a trance--and this vision easily comprises one-half of the novel--in which he befriends himself in a former existence as a court poet Sah-lûma in the ancient pagan city of Al-Kyris five-thousand years before Christ. Although Theos is

astonished to discover Sah-lûma writing poetry that he had always felt to be of his own composition, the mystery of Sah-lûma's identity is only completely disclosed to the muddled Theos and to the reader at the end of the second book; nevertheless, throughout the vision, Theos is symbolically attached to the old, sensual, egotistical body of his prior self, and vainly struggles to save himself as Sah-lûma from the mistakes that he once made. A skeptic like Theos, Sah-lûma reigns supreme in a city otherwise governed by a voluptuous king and a still more voluptuous high priestess, who, while ostensibly chaste, numbers among her lovers nearly the whole of the noble male population of Al-Kyris including Sah-lûma and the king. Theos, incidentally, after considerable struggle, rejects the advances of the high priestess when she invites him to murder the jealous Sah-lûma for her. Among the other wonderful events that happen in Al-Kyris are the prophecies of Khosrûl, who, amid such terrifying portents as a toppling obelisk which crushes a good part of the population of Al-Kyris and a volcanic river of blood, predicts, like an ancient Heliobas, the destruction of Al-Kyris and the coming of Christ as signified by the star and the cross; the phenomena of the electrical apparatus of Al-Kyris, as well as its thinly disguised version of the Shakespeare authorship controversy, both of which apparently demonstrate Miss Corelli's concern with the perfect repetition of historical cycles; the horrifying deaths by poison of the lovers of the high priestess and the sacrificial deaths of those who are offered to the python god of the city; and, finally, the climactic sacred celebration in which Sah-lûma learns too

late that he is in love with one of his servants--the prototype of his angel love--who sacrifices herself to the snake god out of love for him just before a tremendous volcanic eruption annihilates everyone in the city except Theos, who, in carrying away the body of Sah-luma, suddenly recognizes his relationship to his dead comrade. In the last book, "Poet and Angel," there is little action but much propagandistic discourse by Theos, now a believer, who seems to be interested in converting the whole of atheistic London. And, in a totally unessential anti-climax, Theos's angel love is embodied in human form evidently for the sole purpose of satisfying the Victorian requirement for at least one marriage at the end of every novel.

In spite of the fact that it too is a prophetic romance and consequently encumbered by a good deal of supernatural paraphernalia, as well as the usual Corellian melodrama, The Sorrows of Satan approaches, until its final fifty pages, Edwin Muir's definition of the dramatic novel--that is, the ideal synthesis in which neither plot nor characters take precedence but rather so combine that the action of the plot grows out of the characters, and appearance and reality become one.³² In Old Gods Falling, Malcolm Elwin depicts The Sorrows of Satan as a "genuine satire on the vices of the society";³³ and it is also interesting to note that, while The Sorrows of Satan contains such primarily flat characters as the heroine, villainess,

³²Ibid., p. 30.

³³Elwin, pp. 304-305.

and hero-narrator, who is even more thick-headed than Theos Alwyn, presumably in order that Miss Corelli may retain the suspense of the plot, the Satan of the romance, Lucio Rimáñez, emerges as a fairly engrossing example of round, ironic portraiture. In fact, William T. Stead terms him a tragic hero, although, at the same time, he observes that Miss Corelli arouses such sympathetic interest in her heroic Satan that the total effect of the novel is, perhaps, to make an unseen villain out of God.³⁴ Miss Corelli's representation of Satan as redeemable in this novel is likewise at variance with her later description of him as suffering eternal torture in her pompous discussion of her prophetic romances in her "Prologue" to The Life Everlasting.³⁵ The flat characters themselves may possibly be excused--if we must make excuse for them--on the ground that they serve an allegorical function in the novel. Thus, the two feminine characters typify good and bad society; and the devil, who really admires virtue and detests evil in this twist on the Faustian theme, walks amid English society sardonically delineating--as the author herself otherwise would observe--the viciousness and hypocrisy of most men and especially women, whom Miss Corelli blames for the sins of society.

As the story opens, we are introduced to the hero-narrator Geoffrey Tempest, a penniless idealistic writer of considerable talent, who is

³⁴W. T. Stead, "The Sorrows of Satan--and of Marie Corelli," p. 455.

³⁵See above, p. 98.

presently starving in a dingy room, while the wind, accompanied by occasional strange, violin harmonies, obviously of diabolic origin, howls outside. His last book having been rejected for its old-fashioned ideas and lack of indecency, Tempest finds himself poised precariously on the brink of despair until he receives two sums of money--a modest fifty pounds from an old acquaintance whom Tempest later upbraids for stinginess when he learns of his former companion's newly-acquired wealth, and a fabulous five million pounds from an unknown uncle whose shifty solicitors ultimately confide to the legatee that the old man had the erratic idea "that he had sold himself to the devil, and that his large fortune was one result of the bargain" (The Sorrows of Satan, p. 52). On the same night that news of his millions reaches him, however, Tempest receives a call from the magnificent Prince Lucio Rímanez, whose wealth and knowledge appear to be unlimited and whose age, appearance, lineage, and conversation are veiled in mystery. Tempest and Lucio, for whom Tempest feels a compelling attraction, soon become friends, as the otherwise idealistic Tempest begins to deteriorate into a gluttonous, unsympathetic, selfish lout, who, without delay, publishes and booms his own book, and maliciously slates as an anonymous reviewer the superior work of a rival novelist Mavis Clare. With Lucio always beside him, then, Tempest wanders in and out of a series of adventures--he proposes to the cold, cynical Sibyl Elton, whose titled but impoverished father and paralyzed sin-blasted mother have urged her to maneuver for a rich husband; he observes the suicide of a worthless society dandy, the Viscount Lynton,

who plays baccarat with Lucio for his soul; he finds himself attracted to the innocent, girlish Mavis Clare, whose novels are supposedly gems of genius, although she has failed to win the critical recognition she deserves; and he is eventually betrothed to Lady Sibyl in a fantastic celebration, the ceremonies of which are conducted by Lucio and a tribe of infernal imps. Some time after the wedding, Lucio moves in with Tempest and his bride, stating: "The peaceful contemplation of virtuous marriage will do me good. . . I've come to stay" (The Sorrows of Satan, p. 331). But Tempest soon acquires an aversion for his beautiful, unfeeling wife, in whom he painfully finds a mirror for his own heartlessness and contemptuous agnosticism; and, on succeeding nights, he overhears in the darkness two strange conversations-- one in which Lucio kneels to Mavis Clare and asks her to pray for him and another in which his wife is scorned by Lucio as she attempts to make love to him. Tempest denounces Sibyl and leaves her, only to learn that she has committed suicide. Finding the corpse seated before a mirror, the husband turns on a blaze of lamps and sits down to read the unfinished document written by his dying wife, in which she blames her meaningless, empty life on her early training and describes the slow, hideous ravages that the poison she has taken traces on her face and body. The final frenzied anti-climactic scenes of the romance, which belong chiefly to the novel of action, are episodic, eventful and homiletic at the same time, and almost wholly unnecessary, except perhaps for the incident in which Lucio at last reveals his identity to the peculiarly insensitive hero. Thus, Lucio takes his

shattered friend on a vacation to Egypt, where Tempest envisions an ancient Alexandria governed by the lily-crowned prototype of Mavis Clare; assists at the unrolling of the mummified body of a corrupt Theban dancer who poisoned herself at the command of the king and who resembles Sibyl; and, while flying across the ocean in a ship propelled by the devil's crew on the return voyage, imagines that he sees the specter of his tormented wife, whose frequent visitations, along with those of other phantoms, drive him to the verge of suicide. At last, disclosing his real self to Tempest, a glorified Lucio soars joyously into the heavens as Tempest rejects him and pronounces his faith in God. Tempest awakens from unconsciousness to find himself being pulled out of an icy ocean by the men of an English vessel who inform him that his Jewish solicitors have swindled him of most of his millions. Once in England, nevertheless, Tempest halts all proceedings against the forgers, and, having already settled on his wife half of his estate which reverted to her father at her death, Tempest again recognizes himself for a penniless, but free, man--until a critic unexpectedly slashes his novel and he consequently becomes a best-seller. Humbly he sets to work on a new literary enterprise and the reformation of his character in the hope that he will be worthy of one day marrying Mavis Clare, whom he decides that he really loves. After all, therefore, poor Tempest not only gets faith and fortune, but a girl as well.

The three novels, Thelma, Ardath, and The Sorrows of Satan, evince plots that are primarily indicative of the Victorian romantic novel of action or

incident; but then as George Saintsbury affirms: "there is at least the suggestion of romance in every novel that deserves the name."³⁶ According to the more modern threefold designations of Edwin Muir, however, Miss Corelli's plots, although always heavily dependent upon melodramatic incident, may sometimes be categorized, as in the instances of Thelma and The Sorrows of Satan, under the novel of character or the dramatic novel. In addition to melodramatic situations and coincidences, Thelma, Ardath, and The Sorrows of Satan, like all of Miss Corelli's stories, are marked by flat, black and white characters; didactic explanations and commentaries; and pat Victorian conclusions. Moreover, for the most part, Miss Corelli prefers to focus the attention of the reader on one or two principal characters in each novel, although most of the romances contain a great number and variety of characters. Thus, Thelma and Ardath are composed from the viewpoint of the omniscient author, who tells her story in different ways, allowing herself, as the plot demands, to display the thoughts of now one and now another of a few characters. Whereas other characters more briefly evaluate the events of the tale for us, in Thelma we necessarily spend a greater time in regarding life from the viewpoints of the hero and heroine. First, we are in the mind of Sir Philip Errington, through whose eyes we gradually become acquainted with Thelma; while later we are permitted to observe the baffling behavior of Sir Philip himself through the faulty judgments and conclusions of his

³⁶ Saintsbury, p. 8.

increasingly bewildered wife. Nearly all of Ardath is centered in the consciousness of the poet-hero—a device that enables the author to sustain the suspense of the plot throughout the second book wherein, with only dim recollections of his past and no knowledge of how he got there, Theos suddenly discovers himself in pre-Christian surroundings. The Sorrows of Satan, on the contrary, is composed from the viewpoint of the first person and uses the principal character as narrator; the choice of first person narrator in this novel, as well as in a half dozen other Marie Corelli romances, probably accounts for certain serious distortions in the plot, such as the excessively utilized device of the overheard conversation. Sometimes, as is the case with Miss Corelli's most complicated, but undoubtedly less pleasing, tales, such as The Master Christian, the focus of attention may shift from one group of characters to another. But, whether the viewpoint is first person or third person, Miss Corelli still faces the problem which confronted many Victorian novelists--that is, the problem of making gracefully convincing the transitions from the minds of her characters with their limited insights to her own omniscient vision and standards. And, as Percy Lubbock notes in his discussions of Flaubert and Thackeray: "There is nothing more disconcerting in a novel than to see the writer changing his part in this way--throwing off the character into which he has been projecting himself and taking a new stand outside and away from the story."³⁷

³⁷Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1929), p. 87.

To be sure, Miss Corelli did not solve the difficulty any better than did her more sophisticated contemporaries like George Meredith and Thomas Hardy; a passage from the second book of Ardath will painfully illustrate how great, in fact, was Miss Corelli's inability to cope with the various changes called for by her choice of viewpoint. Here the post-hero Theos Alwyn helplessly observes the despair of his other self Sah-lûma, who suddenly recognizes, just before she sacrifices herself to the snake god, that he loves his servant girl Niphrâta. Although the passage is confused, it seems that not only does Miss Corelli require Theos to delineate the emotions of Sah-lûma; but, in addition, to explain the motivation and disjointed dialogue of a girl who is not capable of understanding her own conflicting feelings, let alone expressing them. And, as if to augment the clumsiness of the scene, Miss Corelli cannot refrain from interjecting her own pitying exclamation about the plight of loving women--an exclamation that calls for an abrupt transition from Theos to the author at a critical point in the plot:

Sah-lûma recoiled from her [Niphrâta], amazed and stupefied. Theos clenched his hands together in a sort of physical effort to keep down the storm of emotions working within him, for Niphrâta's words burst into his brain like fire; too well, too well he understood their full intensity of meaning! She loved the ideal Sah-lûma, the Sah-lûma of her own pure fancies and desires--not the real man as he was, with all his haughty egotism, vainglory, and vice, vice in which he took more pride than shame. Perhaps she had never known him in his actual character; she, like other women of her lofty and ardent type, had no doubt set up the hero of her life as a god in the shrine of her own holy and enthusiastic imagination, and had there endowed him with resplendent virtues, which he had never once deemed it worth his while to practice. Oh, the loving hearts of women! How much men have to answer for, when they voluntarily break

these mirrors of affection, wherein they, all unworthy, have been for a time reflected angel-wise, with all the warmth and color of an innocently adoring passion shining about them like the prismatic rays in a vase of polished crystal! To Niphrâta, Sah-lûma remained as a sort of splendid divinity, for whom no devotion was too vast, too high, or too complete; better, oh, surely far better, that she should die in her beautiful self-deception, than live to see her elected idol descend to his true level, and openly display all the weaknesses of his volatile, flippant, godless, sensual, yet, alas! most fascinating and genius-gifted nature--a nature which, overflowing as it was with potentialities of noble deeds, yet lacked sufficient intrinsic faith and force to accomplish them! This thought stung Theos like a sharp arrow-prick, and filled him with a strange, indescribable penitence; and he stood in dumb misery, remorsefully eyeing his friend's consternation, disappointment and pained bewilderment, without being able to offer him the slightest consolation.

Sah-lûma was indeed the very picture of dismay; if he had never suffered in his life before, surely he suffered now! Niphrâta, the tender, the humbly-adoring Niphrâta positively rejected him, refused to recognize his actual presence, and turned insanely away from him toward some dream-ideal Sah-lûma whom she fancied could only be found in that unexplored country bordered by the cold river of Death! (Ardath, pp. 381-382)

Nearly all of the characters of a Marie Corelli novel are of two types: they are flat characters, especially the black and white stereotyped figures of the melodrama; or lifeless, supposedly developing, Dickensian heroes, such as Theos Alwyn and Geoffrey Tempest, whose fault--presumably an ironic lack of perception occasioned by their agnosticism--results in their failure to interpret--although the author has repeatedly testified to their superior intelligences--the simplest events which the reader has already deciphered. Fortunately, children appear rarely in these novels and are depicted as the major characters in only one, or possibly two, of the stories, The Mighty Atom and Boy. Miss Corelli's portraits of innocent, blue-eyed infants are a little more realistic, nevertheless, than the treacly sweet baby-talk which

oozes from their mouths. The little, religious Jassamine, girlfriend of the irreligious Lionel Valliscourt, like all Marie Corelli characters talks too much as she describes a fairy tale to her scientific-minded, paternal, ten-year old comrade in The Mighty Atom:

"There was once a little girl an' little boy,--'bout s' big as we be,--they was good an' prutty, an' they'd got a bad, bad ole uncle. He couldn't abide 'em 'cos they was good an' 'e was s' bad; so one day 'e took 'em out in a great dark wood where no sun couldn't shine, an' there 'e lost 'em both. An' when they was lost, they walked 'bout, up an' down, an' couldn't get out nohow, an' they got tired an' 'ungry, an' so they laid down an' said their prayers, an' put their arms round each other's necks,--so--" (The Mighty Atom, p. 85)

And Boy's childish welcoming utterances to Miss Letitia Leslie--replete with Corellian translation--are even more dreadful, although we must admit that the Baron de B.-W. (Bookworms), Sir Francis Burnand of Punch, whom Miss Corelli had castigated five years before in her article in The Idler, thought enough of the story to indicate that it alone would be sufficient to establish its author's reputation "among the very best of our novelists whose works English readers would not willingly let die."³⁸

³⁸Baron de B.-W. [Sir Francis Burnand], "Boy," Punch, CXVIII (July 25, 1900), 60-61. Burnand assigns Boy a first place in the family of literary boys, along with Oliver Twist, Tommy Traddles, and Little Lord Fountleroy; and, after additional comments upon the charm, humor, and pathos of the book, he concludes by pronouncing Boy "a work of genius." It is but fair to note that other journals took exception to Burnand's praise, one going so far as to declare that Punch had never done anything better in the way of satire. (Cited by Bigland, p. 188)

"Me vezy well," answered Boy placidly, twining round his dumpy fingers a long delicately-linked chain which "Kiss-Letty" always wore: "vezy well, 'sank 'oo!" (this with a big sigh). "Me awfu' bozzered" (bothered) "'bout Dads! Poo Sing! Vezy, vezy ill!" (Boy, p. 31)

But notwithstanding the appalling tastelessness of Miss Corelli's baby-talk, it is, after all, actually no worse than the sham medieval rhetoric which she employs in such works as the second book of Ardath and Barabbas--rhetoric which too obviously aims at literary elegance and rises to such passionate eloquence as never gushed from human lips. Hence, the prophet Khosrûl of Ardath exhorts Sah-lûma to make amends for his sinful, wasted life, although we tend to pardon the poor poet for not heeding this sermon, which comprises some four pages of the two-hundred-thousand word novel, and begins:

"Sah-lûma! Sah-lûma!" and the piercing, reproachful voice of the prophet penetrated every part of the spacious square like a sonorous bell ringing over a still landscape. "O divine spirit of song pent up in gross clay, was ever mortal more gifted than thou! In thee was kindled the white fire of heaven; to thee were confided the memories of vanished worlds; for thee God bade his nature wear a thousand shapes of varied meaning; the sun, the moon, the stars were appointed as thy servants; for thou wert born POET, the mystically chosen teacher and consoler of mankind! What hast thou done, Sah-lûma; what hast thou done with the treasures bestowed upon thee by the all-endowing angels? How hast thou used the talisman of thy genius? To comfort the afflicted; to dethrone and destroy the oppressor; to uphold the cause of justice; to rouse the noblest instincts of thy race; to elevate and purify the world? Alas! alas! thou hast made thyself the idol of thy muse, and, thou being but perishable, thy fame shall perish with thee! Thou hast drowsed away thy manhood in the lap of vice, thou hast slept and dreamed when thou shouldst have been awake and vigilant; not I, but thou shouldst have warned this people of their coming doom! Not I, but thou shouldst have marked the threatening signs of the pregnant hour; not I, but thou shouldst have perceived the first faint glimmer of God's future scheme of glad salvation; not I, but thou shouldst have

taught and pleaded, and swayed by thy matchless sceptre of sweet song the passions of thy countrymen! Hadst thou been true to that first flame of thought within thee, O Sah-lûma, how thy glory would have dwarfed the power of kings! Empires might have fallen, cities decayed, and nations been absorbed in ruin, and yet thy clear-convincing voice, rendered imperishable by its faithfulness, should have sounded forth in triumph above the foundering wrecks of Time! O poet, unworthy of thy calling! How hast thou wantoned with the sacred muse! How thou hast led her stainless feet into the mire of sensual hypocrisies and decked her with the trumpery gew-gaws of a meaningless fair speech! How thou hast caught her by the virginal hair and made her chastity the screen for all thine own licentiousness! Thou shouldst have humbly sought her benediction; thou shouldst have handled her with gentle reverence and patient ardor; from her wise lips thou shouldst have learned how best to practise those virtues whose praise thou didst evasively proclaim; thou shouldst have shrined her, throned her, worshipped her and served her, yea, even as a sinful man may serve an angel who loves him." (Ardath, pp 320-321)

In contrast, the choral dialogue of the rustics of God's Good Man and The Treasure of Heaven is handled with a skill that suggests the influence of Thomas Hardy;³⁹ the distinction between their homely conversations and comical scenes and the rhythmical, inflated sermonizing of everyone else, however, while not as extreme as that of "most moderately good novels" written in France and England "over the last half of the eighteenth century and well into the Victorian age,"⁴⁰ is only diminished to the extent that Miss Corelli

³⁹W. T. Stead's most favorable comment on The Master Christian concerns the peasant folk of the novel: "It is when Miss Corelli gets among simple folk and tells their simple story, that Marie Corelli is at her best." (W. T. Stead, "The Master Christian," p. 295)

⁴⁰J. M. S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England: 1770-1800 (London, 1932), pp. 358-359.

attempts--with varying degrees of success--to make the ordinary characters of these novels more human than those of Ardath or Barabbas, or any of the other prophetic romances.

In keeping with the characteristics of the novel of action as Edwin Muir has enunciated them, all of Marie Corelli's romances, with possibly the significant exceptions of the autobiographical novels, end on the same triumphant note of poetic justice as Thelma, Ardath, and The Sorrows of Satan. But then as E. M. Forster in his classic study on Aspects of the Novel has affirmed:

In the losing battle that the plot fights with the characters, it often takes a cowardly revenge. Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up. Why is this necessary? Why is there not a convention which allows a novelist to stop as soon as he feels muddled or bored? Alas, he has to round things off, and usually the characters go dead while he is at work, and our final impression of them is through deadness.

.....
 If it was not for death and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude. Death and marriage are almost his only connection between his characters and his plot, and the reader is more ready to meet him here, and take a bookish view of them, provided they occur later on in the book; the writer, poor fellow, must be allowed to finish up somehow, he has his living to get like any one else, so no wonder that nothing is heard but hammering and screwing.

This--as far as one can generalize--is the inherent defect of novels: they go off at the end: and there are two explanations of it: firstly, failure of pep, which threatens the novelist like all workers: and secondly, the difficulty which we have been discussing. The characters have been getting out of hand, laying foundations and declining to build on them afterwards, and now the novelist has to labour personally, in order that the job may be done to time. He

pretends that the characters are acting for him. He keeps mentioning their names and using inverted commas. But the characters are gone or dead.⁴¹

Marriage and death, as we have already seen, generally denote the end of good and evil in a Marie Corelli novel; often, as in Ardath, The Master Christian, and The Life Everlasting, marriage, without benefit of ordinary religious sanction, is the reward of the loving believer; and, although, on the one hand, in typical Shakespearean fashion, a good person does infrequently, as in A Romance of Two Worlds, Barabbas, and The Murder of Delicia, encounter a disastrous fate, he or she usually dies gloriously happy. On the other hand, in the autobiographical novels, Innocent and Open Confession, the faithless lovers supposedly endure the affliction of living away from the deserted heroines--a questionably tragic fate at best--while the virtuous heroines suffer: Innocent dies of some undiagnosable malady, probably unrequited love, and the heroine of Open Confession unpersuasively protests that she is better off anyway without her lecherous boyfriend. Notwithstanding these two exceptions of the autobiographical novels, Miss Corelli seems to resort almost joyfully to deus ex machina devices to conclude her stories in accordance with poetic justice, supernatural phenomena as well as melodramatic natural prodigies like volcanic eruptions and storms representing her most unblushingly favorite methods of ending her tales.

In all of the psychic novels, as listed by Marie Corelli, prophetic

⁴¹E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1927), pp. 142-144.

dreams and visions remain one of the constantly recurring motifs. The Rosicrucians believe that when the ego is outside of the body it can see coming events because before anything happens in the material world it has already happened in the spiritual world; and that man, having evolved the faculty of allowing the soul to leave the body, can consciously live a fuller, more real life in invisible worlds.⁴² Thus, A Romance of Two Worlds, Ardath, and The Life Everlasting depict the greater part of the action of the plot as occurring in visionary worlds; whereas The Soul of Lilith, Barabbas, The Sorrows of Satan, and The Master Christian utilize the dream or vision to give impetus to the action of the plot, and, in the case of the last three novels, as a means of resolving the plot. Some of the dreams and visions are more interesting than others: in the visions of A Romance of Two Worlds the emphasis on love, as symbolized by electricity, and the utopian state suggest the influence of Shelley; in Barabbas Pilate's wife explains her dreams--and they are worth waiting for--of Christ's mastery and her husband's suicide; and in The Sorrows of Satan the influence of Macbeth insinuates itself in a recurring vision of three fates which haunts the millionaire hero:

Towards morning however, perhaps about four or five o'clock, I woke suddenly as though touched by an invisible hand. I was shivering violently, and my body was bathed in a cold perspiration. In the otherwise dark room there was something strangely luminous, like a cloud of white smoke or fire. I started up, rubbing my eyes,--and stared before me for a moment, doubting the evidence of my own senses. For, plainly

⁴²Max Heindel, The Rosicrucian Philosophy in Questions and Answers (London, 1922), p. 71.

visible and substantially distinct, at a distance of perhaps five paces from my bed stood three Figures, muffled in dark garments and closely hooded. So solemnly inert they were,--so heavily did their sable draperies fall about them that it was impossible to tell whether they were men or women,--but what paralyzed me with amazement and terror was the strange light that played around and above them,--the spectral, wandering chill radiance that illumined them like the rays of a faint wintry moon. I strove to cry out,--but my tongue refused to obey me--and my voice strangled in my throat. The Three remained absolutely motionless,--and again I rubbed my eyes, wondering if this were a dream or some hideous optical delusion. Trembling in every limb, I stretched my hand towards the bell, intending to ring violently for assistance,--when--a Voice, low and thrilling with intense anguish caused me to shrink back appalled, and my arm fell nerveless at my side.

"Misery!"

The word struck the air with a harsh reproachful clang, and I nearly swooned with the horror of it. For now one of the Figures moved, and a face gleamed out from beneath its hooded wrappings--a face white as whitest marble and fixed into such an expression of dreadful despair as froze my blood. Then came a deep sigh that was more like a death-groan, and again the word "Misery!" shuddered upon the silence!

Mad with fear and scarcely knowing what I did, I sprang from the bed, and began desperately to advance upon these fantastic masqueraders, determined to seize them and demand the meaning of this practical and untimely jest,--when suddenly all three lifted their heads and turned their faces on me,--such faces!--indescribably awful in their pallid agony,--and a whisper more ghastly than a shriek, penetrated the very fibres of my consciousness--"Misery!"

With a furious bound I flung myself upon them,--my hands struck empty space! Yet there--distinct as ever--they stood, glowering down upon me, while my clenched fists beat impotently through and beyond their seeming corporeal shapes! And then--all at once--I became aware of their eyes,--eyes that watched me pitilessly, stedfastly, and disdainfully,--eyes, that like witch-fires, seemed to slowly burn terrific meanings into my very flesh and spirit. Convulsed and almost frantic with the strain on my nerves, I abandoned myself to despair,--this ghastly sight meant death I thought,--my last hour had surely come! Then--I saw the lips of one of those dreadful faces move . . . some superhuman instinct in me leaped to life, . . . in some strange way I thought I knew,

or guessed the horror of what the next utterance would be,
 . . . and with all my remaining force I cried out,--

"No! No! Not that eternal Doom! Not yet!"

Fighting the vacant air, I strove to beat back those
 intangible awful Shapes that loomed above me, withering up
 my soul with the fixed stare of their angry eyes, and with
 a choking call for help, I fell, as it were, into a pit of
 darkness. . . . (The Sorrows of Satan, pp. 116-118)

Sermons are another unifying device repeatedly exploited by Miss Corelli. On the one hand, of course, each of Marie Corelli's novels may easily be considered one prolonged, strident sermon. On the other hand, sermons in the narrow sense constitute significant portions of the religious novels The Master Christian, God's Good Man, and Holy Orders; whereas sermons of the more informal variety are exemplified throughout the mystic romances and are usually propounded by one of Miss Corelli's wearisome monks or by one of her glorified converts.

As we have already suggested, symbols of purity, innocence, and simplicity are regularly associated with Marie Corelli's autobiographical heroines; white gowns, luminous diamonds, and especially flowers are among the notable and rather commonplace symbols thus utilized. Flowers--particularly lilies, violets, heather, and a diversity of roses--are likewise represented to denote undying youth, chaste love, and apparently the Rosicrucian order, which is typified by the cross, star, and rose wreath. In contrast, dogs--usually big dogs with impressive names like Leo, Spartan, Wyvis, Nebbie, Plato, and Emperor--testify to the delicate heroine's--or sometimes the hero's--expert authority and firmness. Many of Miss Corelli's feminine characters are further designated by names that immediately

acquaint the reader with their predominant traits--some have sweet flower names like Jassamine, Lotys, and Azalea; others have exotic, often ominous-sounding, names like Zara, Edris, Lysia, Ulrika, Lovisa, Sibyl, Jaycinth, and Ziska; while still others have names seemingly in accord with the old humor characters like Delicia--a dainty, lovely creature--Angela of The Master Christian--an ethereal painter--Innocent--a little too much so--Diana of The Young Diana--an eternally young, chaste beauty--and Morgana of The Secret Power--a creature of mysterious Celtic origins with extraordinary scientific powers. Serpents, a traditional symbol of evil, are fittingly associated with such promiscuous villainesses as Lysia of Ardath, who wears a serpent wreath and commands a python god; Judith Iscariot of Barabbas, whose deadly wiles are clearly delineated in terms of snake imagery; and Sibyl Elton of The Sorrows of Satan, to whom the devil gives a serpent girdle of superb jewels as a wedding present. Symbols of healing and life are signified by Miss Corelli's incessant use of the elixir of life, light, electricity, and radium in the prophetic novels; and, besides denoting love, electricity is the means of energizing wonderful inventions on other planets in A Romance of Two Worlds, as well as on the earth in the ancient city of Al-Kyris in Ardath and in the futuristic romances of The Life Everlasting and The Secret Power. Aside from dreams and visions, reincarnation and soul figures are exemplified in the glittering beetle that emerges from an Egyptian mummy in The Sorrows of Satan, and the butterfly--a more common as well as commonplace device in these novels--is portrayed, in combination with

other symbols, in a number of passages in The Secret Power as a symbol of the frail, superhuman, spiritual heroine. Indeed, as we have seen, the characters themselves are often lifeless embodiments of the spirit-flesh, faith-unfaith allegory which dominates the prophetic romances, although in Barabbas, The Master Christian, God's Good Man, and Holy Orders the characters, as well as tarnished cathedrals and lavish vestments, suggest dead religion or perverted religion, in keeping with Miss Corelli's crusade against High Church and Catholic Church practices.

By this time, the obvious peculiarities of Miss Corelli's style must be plain to the reader. Her lush descriptions of nature are replete with examples of the pathetic fallacy,⁴³ and her imagery, on the whole, while vivid and concrete, is not exceptional. From her two dozen books we can, of course, glean illustrations of a few striking lines, such as her simple account of nature's reaction to the death of Christ from Barabbas:

It was "finished;"--the winged glory in the skies folded itself up and fled away, and like a torch inverted, the red sun dropped into the night. (Barabbas, p. 196)

Or her two-chapter long narration of the Resurrection itself from the same book, or her melodramatic representation from The Master Christian of a moonlight duel in which both sensual combatants are mortally wounded and which closes with the death of one of the now repentant victims:

His eyes were closing--yet he forced himself to open them as he sank back heavily on the turf, and then--then he saw the great white moon descending on him as

⁴³See above, pp. 143-146.

it seemed, like a shield of silver flung down to crush him, by some angry god! (The Master Christian, p. 348)

The unknown reviewer of The Morning Post who made the unforgivable faux pas of referring to Miss Corelli's "full-blooded, Turkey-carpet style of writing"⁴⁴ probably epitomizes in as few words as possible the lack of discipline which vitiates what another critic calls her "genuine literary power."⁴⁵ Pleasantly rhythmical and alliterative as much of Miss Corelli's prose is, it frequently reveals a persistent want of variety in its monotonous wild and whirling rush of emotional intensity as typified by numerous exclamations and apostrophes and a highly-colored vocabulary--all of which, nevertheless, should preclude, as in fact they do at least in Emily Brontë, a deficiency of economy and directness that is otherwise apparent in the dead perfection of long descriptive passages and dull, moralistic dialogue. In other words, it would seem that Miss Corelli suffers from the same paradoxical malady which David Cecil claims afflicts Charles Dickens--the age's most brilliant, typical, yet imperfect novelist⁴⁶--insofar as both authors are likely to plunge from lengthy conversation directly into a maelstrom of melodramatic intrigue finding expression in dramatic confrontations and lurid diction. A glance at almost any episode in a Marie

⁴⁴Cited by Bigland, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁵Murray, p. 216.

⁴⁶David Cecil, Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation (London, 1934), pp. 48, 58.

Corelli novel will illustrate most of these qualities of her style--such as this scene in which Geoffrey Tempest of The Sorrows of Satan is observed conversing with a wealthy American friend, Diana Chesney, who is living with Sibyl Elton, the woman Tempest is presently wooing:

It must have been about a week or ten days after the Levée that I had the strange scene with Sibyl Elton I am about to relate; a scene that left a painful impression on my mind and should have been sufficient to warn me of impending trouble to come had I not been too egotistical to accept any portent that presaged ill to myself. Arriving at Lord Elton's house one evening, and ascending the stairs to the drawing-room as was now my usual custom, unannounced and without ceremony, I found Diana Chesney there alone and in tears.

"Why, what's the matter?" I exclaimed in a rallying tone, for I was on very friendly and familiar terms with the little American. "You, of all people in the world, having a private 'weep': Has our dear railway papa 'bust up'?"

She laughed a trifle hysterically.

"Not just yet, you bet!" she answered, lifting her wet eyes to mine and showing that mischief still sparkled in them. "There's nothing wrong with the funds as far as I know. I've only had a--well--a sort of rumpus with Sibyl."

"With Sibyl?"

"Yes,"--and she rested the point of her little embroidered shoe on a footstool and looked at it critically. "You see it's the Catsups' 'At Home' to-night, and I'm invited and Sibyl's invited; Miss Charlotte is knocked up with nursing the Countess, and I of course made sure that Sibyl would go. Well, she never said a word about it till she came down to dinner, and then she asked me what time I wanted the carriage. I said, 'Are you going too?' and she looked at me in that provoking way of hers, you know!--a look that takes you in from your topmost hair to your shoe-edge, and answered, 'Did you think it possible.' Well, I flared up, and said of course I thought it possible,--why shouldn't it be possible? She looked at me in the same way again and said, 'To the Catsups? with you!' Now, you know, Mr. Tempest, that was real downright rudeness, and more than I could stand, so I just gave way to my mind. 'Look here,' I said--'though you are the daughter of an Earl, you needn't turn up your nose at Mrs. Catsup. She isn't half bad,--I don't speak of her money,--but she's a real good sort, and has a kind heart, which it appears to me is more than you have. Mrs. Catsup would never treat me as

unkindly as you do.' And then I choked,--I could have burst out in a regular yell, if I hadn't thought the footman might be outside the door, listening. And Sibyl only smiled, that patent ice-refrigerator smile of hers, and asked, 'Would you prefer to live with Mrs. Catsup?' Of course I told her no,--nothing would induce me to live with Mrs. Catsup, and then she said, 'Miss Chesney, you pay my father for the protection and guarantee of his name and position in English social circles, but the companionship of my father's daughter was not included in the bargain. I have tried to make you understand as distinctly as I can that I will not be seen in society with you,--not because I dislike you,--far from it,--but simply because people would say I was acting as your paid companion. You force me to speak plainly, and I am sorry if I offend. As for Mrs. Catsup, I have only met her once, and she seemed to me very common and ill-bred. Besides I do not care for the society of tradespeople.' And with that she got up and sailed out,--and I heard her order the carriage for me at ten. It's coming round directly, and just look at my red eyes! It's awfully hard on me,--I know old Catsup made his pile out of varnish, but varnish is as good as anything else in the general market. And--and--it's all out now, Mr. Tempest,--and you can tell Sibyl what I've said if you like; I know you're in love with her."

I stared bewildered by her voluble and almost breathless outburst.

"Really, Miss Chesney," I began formally.

"Oh, yes, Miss Chesney, Miss Chesney--it's all very well!" she repeated impatiently, snatching up a gorgeous evening cloak which I mutely volunteered to put on, an offer she as mutely accepted. "I'm only a girl, and it isn't my fault if I've got a vulgar man for a father who wants to see me married to an English nobleman before he dies,--that's his look-out--I don't care about it. English noblemen are a rickety lot in my opinion. But I've as good a heart as anyone, and I could love Sibyl if she'd let me, but she won't. She leads the life of an ice-berg, and doesn't care a rap for anyone. She doesn't care for you, you know!--I wish she did,--she'd be more human!"

"I'm very sorry for all this," I said, smiling into the piquante face of the really sweet-natured girl, and gently fastening the jewelled clasp of her cloak at her throat. "But you mustn't mind it so much. You are a dear little soul, Diana,--kind and generous and impulsive, and all the rest of it,--but--well--English people are very apt to misunderstand Americans. I can quite enter into your feelings,--still, you know Lady Sibyl is very proud--"

"Proud?" she interrupted. "My! I guess it must feel something splendid to have an ancestor who was piked through the body on Besworth field, and left there for the birds to eat. It seems to give a kind of stiffness in the back to all the family afterwards. Shouldn't wonder if the descendants of the birds who ate him felt kinder stuck up about it too!"

I laughed; she laughed with me, and was quite herself again.

"If I told you my ancestor was a Pilgrim Father, you wouldn't believe me I expect!" she said, the corners of her mouth dimpling.

"I should believe anything from your lips!" I declared gallantly.

"Well, believe that, then! Swallow it down if you can! I can't. He was a Pilgrim Father in the Mayflower, and he fell on his knees and thanked God as soon as he touched dry land in the true Pilgrim Father way. But he couldn't hold a candle to the piked man at Besworth."

Here we were interrupted by the entrance of a footman.

"The carriage is waiting, Miss."

"Thanks,--all right. Good-night, Mr. Tempest,--you'd better send word to Sibyl you are here; Lord Elton is dining out, but Sibyl will be home all the evening."

I offered her my arm, and escorted her to the carriage, feeling a little sorry for her as she drove off in solitary state to the festive 'crush' of the successful varnisher. She was a good girl, a bright girl, a true girl,--vulgar and flippant at times, yet on the whole sincere in her better qualities of character and sentiment,--and it was this very sincerity which, being quite unconventional and not at all la mode, was misunderstood and would always be misunderstood by the higher and therefore more hypocritically polished circles of English society.

I returned to the drawing-room slowly and meditatively, telling one of the servants on my way to ask Lady Sibyl if she could see me for a few moments. I was not kept waiting long; I had only paced the room twice up and down when she entered, looking so strangely wild and beautiful that I could scarcely forbear uttering an exclamation of wonder. She wore white as was always her custom in the evenings,--her hair was less elaborately dressed than usual, and clustered over her brow in loose wavy masses,--her face was exceedingly pale, and her eyes appeared larger and darker by comparison,--her smile was vague and fleeting like that of a sleepwalker. She gave me her hand; it was dry and burning.

"My father is out," she began.

"I know. But I came to see you. May I stay a little?"

She murmured assent, and sinking listlessly into a chair, began to play with some roses in a vase on the table beside her.

"You look tired, Lady Sibyl," I said gently. "are you not well?"

"I am quite well," she answered. "But you are right in saying I am tired. I am dreadfully tired!"

"You have been doing too much perhaps?--your attendance on your mother tries you--"

She laughed bitterly.

"Attendance on my mother!--pray do not credit me with so much devotion. I never attend on my mother. I cannot do it; I am too much of a coward. Her face terrifies me; and whenever I do venture to go near her, she tries to speak, with such dreadful, such ghastly efforts, as make her more hideous to look at than anyone can imagine. I should die of fright if I saw her often. As it is when I do see her I can scarcely stand--and twice I have fainted with the horror of it. To think of it!--that that living corpse with the fearful fixed eyes and distorted mouth should actually be my mother."

She shuddered violently, and her very lips paled as she spoke.

.....
 Still playing with the roses near her, she relapsed into silence. Her breath came and went quickly; I saw her long eyelashes quiver against the pale rose-leaf tint of her cheeks,--the pure outline of her delicate profile suggested to my mind one of Fra Angelico's meditative saints or angels. All at once, while I yet watched her admiringly, she suddenly sprang erect, crushing a rose in her hand, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing, her whole frame trembling.

"Oh, I cannot bear it!" she cried wildly. "I cannot bear it!"

I started up astonished, and confronted her.

"Sibyl!"

"Oh, why don't you speak, and fill up the measure of my degradation!" she went on passionately. "Why don't you tell me, as you tell my father, your purpose in coming here? Why don't you say to me, as you say to him, that your sovereign choice has fastened upon me,--that I am the woman out of all the world you have elected to marry! Look at me!" and she raised her arms with a tragic gesture. "Is there a flaw in the piece of goods you wish to purchase? This face is deemed worthy of the fashionable photographer's pains; worthy of being sold for a shilling as one of England's 'beauties,'--this figure has served as a model for the showing-off of many

a modiste's costume, purchased at half-cost on the understanding that I must state to my circle of acquaintance the name of the maker or designer,--these eyes, these lips, these arms are all yours for the buying! Why do you expose me to the shame of dallying over your bargain?--by hesitating and considering as to whether, after all, I am worthy of your gold!"

She seemed seized by some hysterical passion that convulsed her, and in mingled amazement, alarm and distress, I sprang to her and caught her hands in my own.

"Sibyl, Sibyl!" I said, "hush--hush! You are over-wrought with fatigue and excitement,--you cannot know what you are saying. My darling, what do you take me for?--what is all this nonsense in your mind about buying and selling? You know I love you,--I have made no secret of it,--you must have seen it in my face,--and if I have hesitated to speak, it is because I feared your rejection of me. You are too good for me Sibyl,--too good for any man,--I am not worthy to win your beauty and innocence. My love, my love, do not give way in this manner," for as I spoke she clung to me like a wild bird suddenly caged. "What can I say to you, but that I worship you with all the strength of my life,--I love you so deeply that I am afraid to think of it; it is a passion I dare not dwell upon, Sibyl,--I love you too well,--too madly for my own peace--"

I trembled, and was silent,--her soft arms clinging to me robbed me of a portion of my self-control. I kissed the rippling waves of her hair; she lifted her head and looked up at me, her eyes alit with some strange lustre that was not love as much as fear,--and the sight of her beauty thus yielded as it were to my possession, broke down the barriers of restraint I had hitherto imposed upon myself. I kissed her on the lips,--a long passionate kiss that, to my excited fancy, seemed to mingle our very beings into one,--but while I yet held her in my arms, she suddenly released herself, and pushed me back. Standing apart from me she trembled so violently that I feared she would fall, and I took her hand and made her sit down. She smiled,--a very wan smile.

"What did you feel then?" she asked.

"When, Sibyl?"

"Just now,--when you kissed me?"

"All the joys of heaven and fires of hell in a moment!"

I said.

She regarded me with a curious musing frown.

"Strange! Do you know what I felt?"

I shook my head smiling, and pressed my lips on the soft small hand I held.

"Nothing!" she said, with a kind of hopeless gesture.
 "I assure you, absolutely nothing! I cannot feel. I am one
 of your modern women,--I can only think,--and analyze."
 (The Sorrows of Satan, pp. 189-196)

A number of Marie Corelli's favorite devices readily can be identified in this scene--the polite, drawing-room conversation which not very subtly turns to the satirization of wealth and upper class society; the red roses--symbols of passionate love--contrasting with the cold new woman in white--the white gown this time an ironic symbol--and the familiar, excited outbursts. In many instances, to be sure, there is a tedious sameness about everything that Marie Corelli wrote--the characters are similar, only with different names; the sweeping denunciations of people and institutions are similar; the fusty atmospheres are similar, no matter what the exotic settings; the symbols are similar; yes, even the sentences and the words which the characters are made to utter are similar, as reflected in this episode by the repeated utilization of the exclamatory sentence, as well as the use of such robust words as hysterically, bewildered, outburst, wild, beautiful, exclamation, wonder, pale, bitterly, terrifies, dreadful, ghastly, horror, distorted, shuddered, violently, quiver, flashing, trembling, astonished, passionately, tragic, alarm, distress, and excitement. Many of these words are used more than once in this context alone; and to them we might add a few other pet Shelleyian terms of Miss Corelli like terror, phantom, specter, ethereal, and spiritual.

Because of her attacks on the press, her refusal to permit the release of review copies of her books, as well as a gradual deterioration of her

creative abilities which preceded a decline in the sales of her novels after 1910, most of the literary journals ignored the publication of Miss Corelli's stories after 1902-1910; and those few that did sporadically review her novels became increasingly skeptical of her unrestrained romanticism in an age of realism. She was condemned as a wearisome common scold, as her critics emphasized her failure to develop new ideas; or, at least--if not to experiment with refinements of form--to modify the extravagances of her old techniques. That her reviewers could no longer take her very seriously is demonstrated by these excerpts:

Marie Corelli's sin is rather of endless repetition than introduction of side issues.⁴⁷

No matter how hard she may try to alter her method, she cannot see life simply and directly, but always, as it were, through a stained-glass window, strangely coloured, exaggerated, somewhat hectic.⁴⁸

The whole thing [The Secret Power] is too fantastic to be interesting. It leads one to exclaim with Hermione: "Isn't science simply wonderful!"⁴⁹

⁴⁷"Feminine Literature," Independent, LXXII (November 30, 1911), 1203-1204.

⁴⁸Frederic Taber Cooper, "Some Novels of the Month," Bookman (London), XL (February, 1915), 677.

⁴⁹"The New Books," Literary Review of the New York Evening Post (December 3, 1921), pp. 239-240.

Judged from the literary or "highbrow" point of view, this book [Open Confession] is almost incredible. It is a lyrical ecstasy of bathos.

.....
 Instead of an ancient plot dipped into a thin mixture of sentimentality and bathos, you have a fierce ergy of both.⁵⁰

Although, then, Miss Corelli failed to develop new ideas or to experiment with the minute felicities of form that absorbed other writers of the period, it would be erroneous to assume that her novels are, therefore, all alike in their dullness. On the contrary, whatever their defects and limitations, Miss Corelli's many varied tales show that she possessed an insatiable relish for the life that she saw around her, and, perhaps more importantly, for the life that she saw in her imagination; and, within her limited range, she is capable of vividly, dramatically, enthusiastically, and optimistically conveying that life to the reader. In short, Miss Corelli commands, after all--at least in her early novels--one of the first real requirements of the novelist: she is a good story-teller.

⁵⁰Leonard Woolf, p. 777.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In spite of his ignorance of Marie Corelli's novels and his animosity towards her, based on his thesis that Miss Corelli's arrogance actually contributed to the death of her first publisher George Bentley,¹ somehow Michael Sadleir in his article in the Dictionary of National Biography manages to epitomize the major failing of Marie Corelli both as a woman and as a novelist:

The tragedy of Marie Corelli was her inability to understand either why she was popular or why she was unpopular. . . . a woman of talent, she thought herself a genius.

.
Both as an individual and as a writer she was the victim of her own incompetence for self-criticism.²

¹Sadleir, "The Camel's Back," pp. 127-150.

²Michael Sadleir, "Mary Mackay," Dictionary of National Biography: 1922-1930 (London, 1930), pp. 539-542.

In attributing the fantastic popularity of Marie Corelli's novels solely to their contemporary appeal, however, Michael Sadleir and George Bullock seem to have overstated their case.³ It is true, of course, that Marie Corelli had an exceptional talent for giving the public what it demanded. If the public reveled in sentiment, melodrama, and middle-class morality--if the public diverted itself with religious and philosophical discussion, with the occult, with electrical phenomena and wild scientific speculations--then Miss Corelli's romances easily cultivated the interests of numerous readers. Indeed, when the populace foresaw another sinister threat of Catholic domination in England, Marie Corelli wrote The Master Christian, her most vehemently anti-Catholic novel, on the subject; and even as the masses hailed the coronation of Edward VII on August 9, 1902, Methuen was about to publish Miss Corelli's Temporal Power, a romance which not only satirized the king and high public officials, but which also presumed to drag at least one skeleton out of the royal closet in its uncomplimentary treatment of themorganatic marriage of the Prince of Wales. It is thoroughly amazing that Miss Corelli managed to avoid suits for libel, since she always took advantage of her own notoriety by airing her prejudices and controversies in novels in which her enemies were frequently victimized as thinly disguised characters. Her most costly campaign, however, was the one that she waged against reviewers, critics, and journalists. Although she was hailed for her writing by such notable literary men as Robert Hichens, Clement Scott,

³See Sadleir, "Mary Mackay" and George Bullock, "The Corelli Wonder," pp. 140-148.

George Meredith, and Alfred Lord Tennyson, as well as by kings, queens, and clergymen, Miss Corelli could only be satisfied by the unqualified praise of every reviewer; anything less she considered blasphemy against her divinely inspired work. Nevertheless, from 1886 and the publication of A Romance of Two Worlds until 1902 and the publication of Temporal Power, when most of Miss Corelli's best work was done, in spite of her vicious attacks on the journals in her novels; her scathing denunciation of a dozen leading reviewers and journals in her vitriolic article appearing in The Idler for 1895; and her refusal to send out review copies of her stories with the publication of The Sorrows of Satan, several of the scholarly journals such as the Athenaeum, The Review of Reviews, and The Spectator not only noticed, but in addition welcomed each new novel by Miss Corelli, although not without specifying the author's glaring faults in construction, characterization, and style--faults which she stubbornly refused to recognize and which increasingly tend to vitiate her powers of invention, particularly after 1910.

From 1920 until 1930, or possibly later, for the literary elite, Marie Corelli and her novels remained only Victorian curiosities in an age of advancing realism. Bernard Shaw and Rebecca West make her the butt of their considerable wit, and Cornelius Weygandt in A Century of the English Novel describes the case of an unfortunate man who rolled downhill while laughing

at The Sorrows of Satan,⁴ although Miss Corelli's newsworthiness both as a personality and as a phenomenal best-seller is suddenly given some impetus after 1930 by the publication of Bertha Vyver's Memoirs of Marie Corelli. Thereupon a number of writers include her in their studies of Victorian best-seller prodigies. Thus, Amy Cruse in her The Victorians and Their Books uncritically considers Miss Corelli as one of the temporary idols of the age, and erroneously refers to her youthful debut as a writer of twenty-two--Miss Corelli was actually almost thirty-two⁵--Malcolm Elwin in his investigation of best-sellers of the nineteenth-century feels called upon to make excuses for Miss Corelli's extreme popularity, and, somewhat inconsistently, praises Sir Rider Haggard as one of his childhood favorites while at the same time slighting Marie Corelli, apparently unaware of the fact that Haggard was an admirer of Miss Corelli's work⁶ and that the extraordinary similarities between Haggard's She, completed on March 18, 1886, and Miss Corelli's A Romance of Two Worlds, published on February 19, 1886, are difficult to explain on the basis of coincidence alone;⁷ and Frank Luther Mott in his

⁴Cornelius Weygandt, A Century of the English Novel: Being a Consideration of the Place in English Literature of the Long Story; Together with an Estimate of Its Writers from the Heyday of Scott to the Death of Conrad (New York, 1925), pp. 306-307.

⁵Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Books (London, 1935), pp. 416-417.

⁶See Bigland, p. 106.

⁷Elwin, pp. 218-264; 302-306.

Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States also attempts to explain away Miss Corelli's unusual appeal and concludes rather feebly that she was popular at least partially because of "that outrageously bold imagination that makes mystical melodrama."⁸

Furthermore, since 1940 several biographical studies have appeared by George Bullock, Eileen Bigland, and William Stuart Scott. Although none of these studies is entirely satisfactory and none treats critically Miss Corelli's novels except in passing, Bullock himself confidently asserting in his article in Life and Letters To-day, published in 1944, that in twelve years Miss Corelli's works would be unread,⁹ William Stuart Scott, Marie Corelli's latest biographer--and often an unfriendly one at that--reports that a number of BBC critics on a program introduced by Miss C. V. Wedgwood on May 17, 1953, agreed that not only is there a revival of interest in Marie Corelli's stories, but that she who originated the "Soulful School," which began on a low literary level, has now gone highbrow--"the people who continue her pomposity are all frightfully well-educated."¹⁰ Finally, as if to prove the validity of the latter slightly supercilious statement, Margaret M. Maison, in The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel, who is

⁸Mott, p. 178.

⁹Bullock, "The Corelli Wonder," p. 145.

¹⁰Cited by Scott, pp. 210-212.

for once not in the slightest concerned with Marie Corelli the woman or the personality, devotes eight pages of her exciting thesis on the Victorian religious novel to the unstinting, scholarly praise of Marie Corelli's prophetic novels--the sort of unrestrained admiration that Miss Corelli ironically craved, but, at least according to her own estimation, seldom received as one of the best-selling novelists of Victorian England.

Thus, Marie Corelli, a self-appointed prophet in an age of religious unrest--the "most powerful petticoated politician in the world,"¹¹ having evolved her own eclectic philosophy out of scraps of Rosicrucianism and other patches of threadbare romantic motifs, set about converting the English from sectarianism to her own belief in the mystical powers of the individual soul in a tantalizing variety of original novels--ten of them, the prophetic novels, representing a truly remarkable combination of the pseudo-scientific, occult, and religious topics of the day, and all of them identifiable by the author's passionate sincerity in her delineation of her love-faith concepts and her unceasing crusades against the press, organized religion, unbelievers, men, brewers and alcohol, the "cram" system of education, the machine, and high society. On the whole, while her fantastic powers of audacious invention prevail even into a few of her late romances, her best work was done before the First World War; and, as her critics were quick to point out, her last novels suffer from her unrestrained sermonizing and her failure to develop new ideas or a fresh approach to old ideas. Almost all

¹¹"The Defiant Virginity of Marie Corelli," Current Literature, XLV (1908), 511-515.

of her best novels, however, are burdened by excessive length; lack of structure; pat Victorian conclusions; conventional, stereotyped characters; and a tendency to melodrama, which, although it is scarcely ever alleviated by his humor, is rivalled in the period possibly only by Charles Dickens himself. But, in spite of her many defects, Miss Corelli is quite convincing in her electrical, prophetic novels. Two of the earliest, A Romance of Two Worlds and The Soul of Lilit, join the themes of religion and the voyage to the other world; two others, Barabbas and The Master Christian, successfully introduce the figure of Christ as a major character for the first time in popular fiction; and the final three, The Life Everlasting, The Young Diana, and The Secret Power, stress the primacy of science, especially through their electrical and radium inventions. Again, reincarnation is a distinguishing motif of the psychic romances; and, while all of Marie Corelli's stories are peculiarly strong in Gothic elements, two of her first novels, Vendetta! and Wormwood, are relentless in their juxtaposition of scene after scene of Gothic horror.

An admirer of Miss Corelli's work, J. Cuming Walters, editor of the Manchester Chronicle, in his "Epilogue" to Bertha Vyver's Memoirs, speaks of the novelist as one who followed the first Lord Lytton and preceded H. G. Wells in prognostications of marvelous electrical inventions and thought-transference;¹² and Margaret M. Maison, in agreeing that Marie Corelli

¹²Vyver, p. 267.

anticipates much modern space-travel fiction in her A Romance of Two Worlds, claims, more importantly, that she likewise popularized New Testament fiction in England, and rescued the religious novel from its rut of rationalism and pessimism with her own stories written with a religious fervor "reminiscent of St. John's revelations and the ecstasies of the mystics."¹³

¹³Maison, p. 332.

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The dissertation submitted by Joyce C. Gutzeit has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 20 1965
Date

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