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Abstract

The last half of the twentieth century has seen a rapid increase in the process of secularization in both Britain and America, and this trend is nowhere more clearly evident than in the widespread relaxation of sexual mores. Within the Catholic Church a tension has arisen between liberal Catholics who argue for the right of Catholics to act according to the dictates of individual conscience, and traditionalists who champion the absolute moral authority of the Church. Liberal Catholics emphasize the Thomist view in which the flesh and its desires are seen as part of God's creation and, therefore, intrinsically good, while conservative Catholics lean toward an Augustinian/Jansenist view which equates sexual desire with the fallen nature of humankind. There has also been a great deal of unrest among Catholic women regarding continuing misogynistic tendencies within the male-dominated Church.

This study focuses upon portrayals of women and sexuality in selected novels by four representative contemporary Catholic novelists, David Lodge, Mary Gordon, Piers Paul Read, and Anne Redmon. In their fiction, these writers pursue moral questions related to sexuality which preoccupy contemporary Catholics, reflecting in their work the empirical struggle of Catholics to reconcile Church law with their individual needs and desires. In their ratio to each other, these novelists represent in microcosm the spectrum of opinion among lay Catholics regarding sexual morality. Liberals David Lodge and Mary Gordon affirm in their fiction the goodness of the body and its desires, while Piers Paul Read argues for the orthodox view that the flesh must be rigidly controlled in the interests of spiritual health. Anne Redmon explores issues of women and sexuality without entering the debate between liberal and conservative Catholics.

As this study makes clear, the contemporary Catholic novel provides an experientially based context for moral reflection on sexual behaviour parallel to and often in tension with the traditional teaching of the Church. The recent Catholic novel has also provided an important site for the exploration of women's sexual needs, desires, and moral thinking against the background of an all-male hierarchical Church, which has largely been silent in this area.
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Preface

In focusing on the portrayal of women and sexuality in the work of four contemporary British and American Catholic novelists, I hope to show how these writers reflect in their fiction the enormous changes in Catholic life and practice that have taken place in the decades since the Second Vatican Council. My particular interest lies in the ways in which these changes have affected the lives of Catholic women. I have taken the term “Catholic novelist” to denote writers whose work is informed by a distinctly Catholic vision of human life. This broad definition encompasses novels written by Catholic writers of both liberal and orthodox persuasion. The novels of Piers Paul Read, for example, are informed by a traditional Catholic moral view, while the liberal Catholic, Mary Gordon, argues in her fiction for the reform of what she believes are outdated and misogynistic rules for sexual conduct kept in place by a patriarchal Church. David Lodge has moved, on his own admission, from a position of Catholic orthodoxy to an “in many ways agnostic perceptive.” (Preface to The Picturegoers, xi), whereas Anne Redmon has tactfully avoided involvement in the prevailing controversies between traditional and progressive Catholics, focusing instead upon misinterpretations of Catholic dogma which prevent individuals from experiencing the freedom and happiness which she believes God intends for them.

Any endeavour to explore definitively the ways in which women and sexuality have been depicted in the modern British and American novel, even when confined to novels written during the last half of this century, would involve a vast body of fiction. Such an exhaustive examination would be beyond the scope of this study. For this reason, I have set out to provide representative examples of Catholic fiction in which the concerns of Catholic women during the second half of this century are portrayed clearly and in an interesting way. I have chosen to discuss the work of Britons David Lodge and Piers Paul Read, and Americans Mary Gordon and Anne Redmon, writers whose work seems to me to exemplify and elucidate trends and developments in modern Catholic thought and who engage with the major
points of contention which have preoccupied Catholics and fascinated non-Catholic observers during the second half of the twentieth century.

In my discussion of the work of two novelists from each side of the Atlantic, my primary focus has been upon the efforts of individual female fictional characters to live according to Catholic notions of morality within an increasingly secular society and, in the case of some, to throw off what they see as the debilitating legacy of Catholic sexual repression. However, where larger cultural concerns have cast light upon this primary focus, they have been included in such a way that an overall picture of two quite different Catholic cultures clearly emerges. While the increasing secularization of Western society has challenged the Catholic Church in both Britain and America, circumstances unique to each society arising mainly from demographic and historical factors have evoked very different responses. These culturally specific reactions to the changes that the Second Vatican Council has brought in its wake have been woven into the fabric of my discussion.

In my introduction, I provide an account of the Catholic novel at the time when the Second Vatican Council commenced the deliberations that were expected by many Catholics to permit sweeping changes which would drastically change their lives, particularly in the sphere of sexual morality. I proceed to trace the disillusion which followed when it became clear that the hopes of liberal-minded Catholics for a reform of Catholic moral law were to be disappointed and many Catholics began, each for him or herself, to establish a code of sexual ethics in which a compromise could be made between the moral teaching of the Church and the values of secular society. I also provide, in my introduction, a very brief look at the historical origins of the complex framework of moral theology that has evolved during two centuries of Church history and a summary of the arguments of those who accuse the Church of misogyny. It is in early scriptural exegesis and in the writings of the Church Fathers that feminist critics, such as Uta Ranke-Heinemann, believe this misogyny has its origins.
The four principal chapters of my dissertation are devoted to discussion of the four novelists whose work I believe vividly portrays the questions and controversies which have preoccupied Catholics in the last decades of the century -- David Lodge, Mary Gordon, Piers Paul Read, and Anne Redmon. I have chosen not to discuss each writer's work in its entirety, but to select for examination those novels that best illustrate and illuminate my argument. I have also referred briefly to the novels of several other Catholic novelists whose fiction serves to enlarge my discussion or elucidate a point. However, because, as noted above, the public mind tends to equate Institutional Catholicism with a disapproval of the liberal enjoyment of sexuality, and some writers have been tempted to choose a Catholic setting merely to imbue with a heightened sense of illicitness the sexual activities of their characters, I have restricted my study to novels of a critically agreed high literary standing and have excluded novels which seem to me to be potboilers the purpose of which is to titillate the reader with lurid depictions of specifically Catholic sins.

My concluding chapter contains an overview of the current climate of the Catholic Church in terms of its adjustment to modern secular values and a summing up of the role which the Catholic novel has played and continues to play in portraying and commenting upon the concerns of Catholic women. I also include my tentative prognostications both for the future of the Catholic novel and for the outcome of the struggle of Catholic women to be recognized for their individual qualities and potential rather than in terms of gender and prescribed roles.

I would like to express my gratitude and extend my heartfelt thanks to the members of my doctoral committee -- Professor Ross Labrie, my supervisor, and Professors Andrew Busza and Sandra Tomc -- for their advice, encouragement, and support during the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank Professor Eva-Marie Kröller for her helpful suggestions during the preparation of my thesis.
To my husband Graham, my daughters Heidi, Tiffany, and Corisande, and my father Eric Slatter, in love and gratitude for their constant support and their unfaltering faith in me.
Chapter I
Introduction

As the English sociologist Michael Hornsby-Smith has pointed out, "for many people, what particularly defines English Catholicism is [its] obsession with sex" (Roman Catholics in England 89). Hornsby-Smith's remark would be equally true, however, if applied to the opinion of many people in America. In both countries, rebellion within the Church, as well as criticism from outside, has tended to focus upon Church law governing sexual behaviour, particularly the ban on all but "natural" methods of birth control. The vast liberalising changes which the advent of the birth control pill has effected in secular society have served to emphasize what seemed from the outside to be quaint and old-fashioned notions of sexual morality, and what from within the Church is experienced by many Catholics as a "frustrating" and "inconvenient . . . regime" of sexual repression (Afterword to The British Museum is Falling Down 164). To many Catholics, when the Second Vatican Council failed to sanction the use of the birth control pill, it seemed that the institutional Church had painted itself into a corner by refusing to abandon the notion that sexual pleasure is intrinsically sinful. As the American Catholic sociologist, Andrew Greeley put it,

sexual pleasure without procreation had been considered a sinful concession to the weakness of human flesh. This notion, inherited, especially through the writings of Augustine, virtually denies any bonding function to sexual love. It is "natural" in this truncated natural law theory to engage in sexual intercourse to produce children. It is unnatural to engage in it for pleasure. (92).

Although the current teaching of the Church acknowledges a twofold purpose for sexual union between spouses, "the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life," it does not approve the "separation" of these purposes, since to do so would alter "the couple's spiritual life and [compromise] the goods of marriage and the future of the family" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 481). This teaching, which, according to liberal Catholics reflects the Church's deep-seated distrust of sexual pleasure, has resulted in the rebellion of large numbers of Catholics who had expected the Second Vatican Council to sweep away the
cobwebs of “Augustinian dualism” and to formally acknowledge that sexual pleasure is not a mere adjunct of the act of procreation, but is in and of itself both “natural” and good.

The subject matter of both the English and American Catholic novel tends to support the notion that the tension between Catholic moral law and secular moral values finds its focus in Catholic attitudes toward sexual behaviour. As Michael Hornsby-Smith observes, “the Catholic obsession with sex is a recurring theme in the writings of Catholic authors” (Roman Catholics in England 90). In The British Museum is Falling Down, for example, the English novelist David Lodge uses the comic mode in the hope of “engaging the interest and sympathy of non-Catholic and non-Christian readers as well, by presenting the ironies and absurdities of married life under the dispensation of the ‘safe method’” (Afterword 166). His subsequent Catholic novels, though less comic -- and perhaps less optimistic -- in tone, explore the areas of possible compromise for liberal Catholics who wish to remain Catholic while arrogating the right to consult their own consciences in matters of sexual behaviour. In contrast, the American Mary Gordon takes a more pessimistic view. She sees the modern Church as divided into two camps: “sexy people” and “ascetic type[s].” Only ascetic types can remain comfortably within the Church, Gordon argues. In the present climate of sexual repression the “sexy people” are forced to “get out” (lannone 271).

Although unique cultural differences have led to different responses from lay Catholics in the two countries, broadly speaking, Catholics in both England and America have tended to fall into two camps: those eager -- and often impatient -- to bring about reform in Church moral law that would narrow the gap between Catholic and secular moral values and those who look back wistfully to the days before Vatican II when the Church held uncontested authority over the moral conscience of the faithful. Catholic novelists on both sides of the Atlantic portray in their work -- without necessarily taking sides -- the ever widening gulf between liberal Catholics who champion the right of the individual to follow his or her conscience in matters of morality and orthodox Catholics who support the institutional
Church’s claim to absolute moral authority.

A clear understanding of the part played by the Catholic novel in the controversies of the last half of the twentieth century, particularly those concerning the interpretation of roles traditionally ascribed to women, requires a brief look at the background factors that have contributed to the present crisis within the Catholic Church and the influences which have shaped the arguments of both liberal and traditional Catholics. For this reason, it is useful to include a brief survey of the historical factors and traditional beliefs that have informed Catholic moral law; a summary of the arguments of those who accuse the Church of misogyny; and a brief look at the current crisis in the Catholic Church. In order to locate the fiction that I have chosen to study in its literary context, I have also added a short review of the history of the Catholic novel in the twentieth century.

The Background to Catholic Moral Law

The pagan world into which Christianity was born is laced, in the popular imagination, with images of sexual abandon. Early Church records promote the image of a group of ascetic and chaste Christians teaching "self-denial and continence to immoral and intemperate heathens," whereas the truth, according to Uta Ranke-Heinemann, is that Christian hostility toward the body is in fact a legacy of the heathen world (10). While the Roman world did indeed produce several notoriously dissolute figures -- the Roman emperors, Caligula and Nero, to name two -- the widely held belief that the pagan world was one in which, as Peter Brown puts it, "sexual disorder luxuriated" was a "potent" and "inaccurate stereotype" which the clergy and apologists of the early Church did little to discourage since it served to emphasize, by contrast, the strict codes of morality which identified the Christians as a group (208). In fact, accusations of sexual promiscuity by no means travelled one way. Peter Brown observes that "to pagan critics, Christianity was a religion notorious for close association with women" (140).
Writing from a strongly feminist point of view, Uta Ranke-Heinemann also challenges the belief that the pagans were sexually dissolute and that the early Church was a bastion of chastity and restraint. She argues that "the prescriptions of celibate purity derive from the Stone Age of religious consciousness" (99), and she supports her argument with some compelling examples of attempts in Antiquity to suppress the sexual urge which help balance the popular view that pagan practices were unimaginably depraved. "Many pagan priests," she says, "castrated themselves so that they would not be stained by sex, but be pure and holy mediators between the people and the god or goddess" (99).

While there were religious reasons for sexual restraint, such as the need to present oneself chaste before the gods, pagan sexual restraint comes "not from the curse of sin and punishment for it, but predominantly from medical considerations" (9). Ranke-Heinemann goes on to cite several early Greek writers who believed that sexual intercourse was harmful (although only to males) and ought only to be practised with caution. Pythagoras, for example, recommended abstinence in summer, indulgence in winter, and moderate use in spring, since he considered the sexual act to be physically weakening. Soranus, the personal physician of Emperor Hadrian, also felt that sexual activity should be strictly limited in the interests of good health. In the second century, he wrote that "the only justification for sexual activity was the begetting of posterity" and that to go beyond "the bounds of procreation" was to invite "harmful effects" (qtd. in Ranke-Heinemann 10).

Expressing a similar view to Ranke-Heinemann's, Peter Brown argues that there is scant evidence to support the "widespread romantic notion" that the pre-Christian Roman world was sexually abandoned, and to explain "the austerity of Christian sexual ethics... as if it were no more than an understandable, if excessive, reaction to the debauchery that prevailed in the Roman world" (21-22). The physicians of late antiquity equated excessive sexual activity, Brown asserts, with unmanly behaviour. Intercourse was widely considered a "convulsive act" comparable in its causes and effects to "a sudden burst of rage" or an
epileptic fit (18). Worse still, to indulge one's sexuality too often was to risk "sinking into a suspect state of dependence on a woman" and through a loss of "vital spirit," or "heat," to become womanlike (19). Womanliness was a condition to be avidly avoided as women were considered, according to the medical experts of Antiquity, to be "failed males," to whom "the precious vital heat had not come . . . in sufficient quantities in the womb" (10). Thus, to become "womanish" was to deteriorate from male perfection to become an "imperfect," "mutilated" creature (10). Interestingly, according to Simon Le Vay, modern science has shown that in the uterus, "feminine development is the default pathway, the one that is followed in the absence of specific instructions to the contrary" (16), so that males might well be viewed as failed females. However, according to Brown, the devaluation of feminine characteristics was the legacy of the previous "half a millennium" in which women were understood to be lower than men in an irrefutable "natural" hierarchy" (10).

However, despite her "failure" to be male, a woman could achieve "maleness" by remaining a virgin, according to Maurice Hamington, who points out that because woman's nature was considered flawed, one of the concepts in the early Christian valorization of female virginity was that virgins somehow became male. Maleness was equated with the spiritual world and femaleness was identified with the material world and desire. Female virgins were described as "virile" and "manly." Furthermore, the implication of such dualism was that when resurrected, the female body would take on its more perfect spiritual form – the male body. The male body was normative and the female body, and her sexuality, a corruption. (72)

One might expect that since sexual intercourse was considered to involve a loss of "vital spirit" only for the male, a passive acquiescence would have been all that was expected of the female partner. However, Peter Brown cites a Gnostic treatise which reveals that a woman was duty-bound to control her thoughts and fantasies while having sex "out of necessity" with her spouse, lest the child, when born, resemble her adulterous lover rather than her husband (20). Borrowed from the Stoics whose "negative assessment" of human sexuality permeated the first two centuries of Christianity (Ranke-Heinemann 15), ideas such as this were in their turn reinforced by the influence of the sexually pessimistic views of the widely influential
Gnostics of the second century.

Stoicism was the "dominant philosophical system in the Greco-Roman world" during the first century when the New Testament was being written (McClory 9). The Stoics, who included Seneca among their number, "distrusted emotion, viewed dependence on others with scorn, and spoke in terms of justice, not love" (9). The concept of marriage was problematic for the Stoics, since it "tended to make a man and woman mutually dependent" and sexual activity was suspect because of its "emotional (sometimes irrational) overtones" (9). However, after a great deal of debate, orthodox Stoics concluded that marriage is "an appropriate institution" (9), but only as a means of propagating the race. Thus, marriage became increasingly the locus of legitimate sexual activity, although even marriage was "called into question and celibacy was valued more highly. Furthermore, marriage was treated as a concession to those who could not contain themselves, a permit to indulge in lust for those who found lust indispensable" (Ranke-Heinemann 11). Add to this sexual pessimism the assertion of Aristotle, that women are inferior in virtue to men, and one can see clearly the origin of what critics of the Church believe is a tendency to blame women for male sexual transgression. If sexuality is a barrier to spirituality and women's weakness in virtue makes them susceptible to sexual sin, obviously, they become the Devil's convenient instruments with which to threaten the chastity of virtuous manhood. Christian manhood was not slow to exploit this means of shaking off responsibility. Echoing their once virtuous forefather, late of Eden, they were able to say, "the woman made me do it."

For the Gnostics, who were the first of the Christian heretics, the body, as matter, was evil and its appetites were to be suppressed if the soul was to free itself from the seductions and distractions of a fallen physical universe. As Brown puts it, the Gnostics considered the body "deeply alien to the true self" (108), and argued that "only the spirit had the right to exist" (111). The Gnostic Christian teacher, Valentinus, who arrived in Rome from Alexandria in the year 138, went so far as to advocate a "drastic" notion of redemption which involved the
absorption of the "fluid female" into the "dominant male," which would abolish the polarities of male and female. Just as Eve took form from one of Adam's ribs, she would "sink back into the hard, sure bone of Adam" and "the tragedy of a fallen universe would cease" (Brown 114).

In such a process of redemption, woman would then simply cease to exist. Clearly, a disproportionate share of the consequences of the sin committed in Eden had been allotted to womankind by the time Christianity had firmly established itself.

Augustine, arguably western Christianity's most influential Father, converted to orthodox Christianity from Manichaeism, which was "a blend of dualism and Gnosticism...which began in the mid-third century and did not die out until the fourteenth" (McBrien xlix). Peter Brown terms it "the only independent universal religion to emerge directly from the Christian tradition" (197). For Mani, its founder, the body was vile, filthy, and shameful, yet, happily, through continence, it could eventually release the pure spirit of light that is trapped in the body's polluted darkness (198). Augustine did not achieve a place among the pale and emaciated Manichaean "elect" which practised celibacy and followed strict dietary laws. Sexual abstinence was never his forte, at least until he reached mid-life. Augustine came to orthodox Christianity from a "marginal position" as an "auditor," from a relationship with a concubine and, "after his concubine's return to Africa, from a liaison with a "stop-gap mistress, a way of life that had been accepted under the "surprising tolerance of the austere Manichees" (Brown 392).

At the beginning of his ministry, Augustine seems to have been greatly influenced by the typically dichotomous thinking of the Manichaens. His attitude toward his own sexual behaviour was one of extremes. When, in middle age, he achieved the "perpetual continence" which he felt was synonymous with a commitment to orthodox Christianity (Brown 387), "sexual love remained, for him, a leaden echo of true delight," and he regretted not having practised chastity from his youth (394). Because he recognised his own strong sexuality, Augustine immersed himself in an all-male world but, although it is entirely clear he
avoided situations in which his own will-power might be tested, he does not seem to have viewed women as wilful seducers. Augustine was "adamant" for example, "that Eve had not used sexual attraction to lure Adam to eat the fatal fruit: he had eaten with her amicali benevolentia . . . so as to share her life at all times and in every way" (Brown 402). He did not excuse Adam's sin by placing all the blame upon Eve. Rather, he attributed to Adam the sin of uxoriousness -- a love of his wife that had exceeded his love for God -- as Milton was to do, centuries later, in his epic poem Paradise Lost.

Despite his fairness toward Eve, however, Augustine's Manichaean past, with its Gnostic emphases, does seem to have left him with a narrow view of the potential of women in the realm of social intercourse and friendship, as his reflections on the Genesis story of Adam and Eve indicate. Brown argues that Augustine changed the prevailing viewpoint by envisioning Adam and Eve as "physical human beings, endowed with the same bodies and sexual characteristics as ourselves" (401) rather than as ethereal beings similar to angels. He goes on to suggest that Augustine might have suppressed his Manichaean penchant for dichotomous thinking sufficiently to reconcile the seemingly incongruous values of marriage and virginity by portraying them both as "magnificently social" (402). However, throughout his life, Augustine continued to view "the sexual drive" as "a disrupting force" that is "secondary to friendship" (402). Despite his defence of marriage as a social good, Augustine "never found a way, any more than did his Christian contemporaries, of articulating the possibility that sexual pleasure might, in itself, enrich the relations between husband and wife" (402). Sexual intercourse was both necessary and good; sexual pleasure was pervaded with a sense of sin.

While Augustine does not seem to have been guilty of the extreme misogyny which characterises the writing of such Fathers as Albert the Great, he seems to have had difficulty understanding the motives of God the creator in light of the inferiority of women in matters spiritual and intellectual. "In Paradise," as Brown puts it, "Adam and Eve had been what [Augustine] himself had once so dearly wished to be. Friendship, and not sexual desire, had
set the pace of their relations" (402) since desire, before the "fall," had been subject to the will. To illustrate Augustine's lack of appreciation for feminine companionship, Peter Brown paraphrases a question that Augustine asks himself in his *De Genesi ad Litteram*, why God had not created a male companion for Adam since a woman's company was plainly less stimulating than a man's" (402). In *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven*, Uta Ranke-Heinemann's provides a tentative explanation for Augustine's perplexity. She argues that Augustine decided, in accordance with contemporary notions of women's worth, that God's decision to provide Adam with a female companion could only mean that sexual intercourse took place before the fall, but "free of all the excitement that accompanies it today" (88). Only her ability to reproduce made sense of Eve's presence in Eden. She might not have been much of a conversationalist, or have been able to contribute to their shared spiritual growth, but Eve could "fill Paradise with children" (Brown 402).

Augustine would have been surprised and baffled by the accusation that to deem her inferior to Adam involved disparagement of Eve. Instead, he would have seen Eve's position below that of her husband as a logical consequence of the hierarchical organisation of creation. God had created Eve inferior to and, consequently, under the authority of her husband; she had not become so as a result of sin. While it is perhaps true that, as Uta Ranke-Heinemann argues, Augustine was "the man responsible for welding Christianity and hostility to sexual pleasure into a systematic whole" (62) -- perhaps in part because he found sexual continence difficult to achieve and believed that the sexual activity of his youth had stunted his spiritual growth -- it would be unfair to call him to account for later Church misogyny. His views on the status of women do not seem overly misogynistic according to the lights of his time.

During the Dark Ages, "the Stoic-Augustinian foundation remained firm and unchallenged," according to Robert McClory, and continued to dominate Catholic theology until the arrival of the "theological giant," Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century (13).
While Thomas “remained basically faithful to the Augustinian legacy,” he introduced “some progressive nuances” (13), arguing that the value of marriage went beyond its “procreative potential” and that “the delight that proceeds from the act shares in the value of the act itself” (14). After Aquinas, although the Church made no important official pronouncements on the subject of sexuality and birth control, the door remained open to the possibility of a more accommodating view of sexuality for three hundred years until the arrival of Jansenism in the seventeenth century. Jansenism “resurrected . . . the old links between sin and sex, the repugnance toward pleasure, the insistence that any kind of voluntary sexual stimulation outside marriage whether in deed or thought merited damnation” (15). Jansenism and its repressive view of sexuality was brought to England, Ireland, and America, by priests trained at Jansenist schools, and a neo-Augustinian suspicion of sexual pleasure was rapidly established which, according to Church critics, continues to influence to the present day Church moral law regarding sexual behaviour.

The Catholic Church and Misogyny

Since Catholics of both genders are -- at least in theory -- subject to the same institutionally imposed rules regarding their sexual behaviour, it may seem surprising that many feminist theologians argue that Catholic women are somehow "less free" than their male counterparts. Such feminists contend, however, that since very early in the history of the Church, its dogma, its moral law, and its ways of articulating and imagining the relationship between God and humanity have been shaped by a male understanding of the world. Although these remarks are directed toward Western society in general, Mary Field Belenky et al articulate the concerns of many women within the Catholic Church when they say that we believe that conceptions of knowledge and truth that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by the male dominated majority culture. Drawing on their own perspectives and visions, men have constructed the prevailing theories, written histories, and set values that have been the guiding principles of men and women alike. (5)
Richard McBrien cites Thomas Aquinas' assertion that "revelation . . . is always received according to the mode of the receiver" (267). Because the official "receiver" has traditionally been male, the shaping of tradition and the interpretation of Biblical truth have been, consequently, largely paternal. According to this argument, women are less free within the Church because they are required to submit to male interpretations of moral law, and to defer to male opinion when decisions on matters that concern women as much as men are made. In theological matters, feminists have argued, women have been consistently denied validation of their own ways of understanding the relationship between God and the individual.

According to feminist theologians such as Uta Ranke-Heinemann and Mary Daly, women have frequently carried the greater part of the "burden" of Catholic moral teaching on human sexuality while having little to do with the construction of this body of rules. As well as for ignoring women's modes of interpreting the Divine Will, the Church is also frequently accused by feminist theologians of placing the blame for male sexual transgression upon women. The following extract from theologian Albert the Great's *Quaestiones super de animalibus* is an apt example of the misogynist reasoning and wishful-thinking-as-science that feminist theologians believe underpins the modern institutional Church's reluctance to allow women to participate fully in those parts of the hierarchy in which power is wielded. Writing in the Middle Ages, Albert argues that "woman is a misbegotten man" who is less qualified [than a man] for moral behavior. For the woman contains more liquid than the man, and it is a property of liquid to take things up easily and to hold onto them poorly. Liquid is easily moved, hence women are inconstant and curious. When a woman has relations with a man, she would like, as much as possible, to be lying with another man at the same time. Woman knows nothing of fidelity. Believe me, if you give her your trust, you will be disappointed. Trust an experienced teacher. For this reason, prudent men share their plans least of all with their wives. Woman . . . has a faulty and defective nature in comparison with [man's]. . . . What she cannot get, she seeks to obtain through lying and diabolical deceptions. . . . Woman is strictly speaking not cleverer but slyer (more cunning) than a man. Cleverness sounds like something good, slyness sounds like something evil. . . . Her feelings drive woman toward every evil, just as reason impels man toward all good. (qtd. in Ranke-Heinemann 178-9).

Although, obviously, no Catholic theologian would consciously use such blatantly misogynist
notions of the nature of womankind to defend the current status quo within the Church, feminist theologians believe that such views linger on sufficiently to influence the male hierarchy even in the present day.

Feminist theologians argue that Catholic misogyny has its roots in the teaching of Church Fathers (particularly that of Augustine) assimilated by the Church in its earliest years, that sexual appetite is a direct result of the "fall" of humankind. Sexual intercourse was considered from earliest times to be a base and undignified consequence of Adam's sin in which humanity is forced to imitate the beasts in their lascivious coupling. One might expect that, since sexual union requires the participation of both partners, both would be guilty of the sin of "sensual pleasure" according to this view. However, this was not considered by the early Church to be the case, as Mary Daly points out in a reference to the work of Simone de Beauvoir, who argues that "Christian antifeminism has always been linked to antisexuality" (qtd. in Daly 21). As the predominantly male hierarchy of the growing Church struggled with the burden of guilt evoked by their difficulty in suppressing sexual desire, "weak" and "fickle" woman as "other" became a natural scapegoat for blame. Thus, "in the mentality of the Fathers, woman and sexuality were identified. Their horror of sex was also horror of woman" (46). "For what is woman," asks the fourth century Father, John Chrysostom, "but an enemy of friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable misfortune, a domestic danger, delectable mischief, a fault in nature, painted with beautiful colours?" (Ranke-Heinemann 236). Sexual pleasure was a sin, but men could not fairly be condemned for giving in to their sexual desires. Women wantonly inflamed men and enticed them into sin, just as Eve, the first woman, led Adam astray. Ancient medical knowledge supported this view, contemporary Roman society affirmed it, and so, it seemed to the Early Church fathers, did biblical exegesis.

While the figure of Eve as the evil temptress is in theory balanced by the image of Mary as the "second [and immaculate] Eve," feminists find the traditional image of Mary to be
largely a construction of the celibate male's wishful thinking. Mary has indeed been "glorified" in Church tradition, but less for the courageous woman that the Bible account of her presence among the jeering soldiers at the foot of the cross presents, than for her placidity, her acquiescence, her deference to her son, and most importantly, for her perpetual virginity. As both mother and virgin, Mary provides a unique figure of womanhood which ordinary women cannot hope to emulate. Thus, her glorification has not allowed "women in the concrete" to "shake off their bad reputation." Rather, women have "continued to bear most of the burden of blame [for sexual sin]" (Daly 46). As Maurice Hamington notes, rather than enhancing the position of women within the Church, "the unattainable pedestal Mary was placed upon made it easy for those caught up in religious zeal to find fault with ordinary women because it contrasted with the characterization of ordinary women, who were seen as sexually insatiable and easily corrupted. The Eve/Mary dualism . . . made it easy to find women who did not match Mary's perceived piety and behavior" (Hamington17).

The tendency in traditional Catholic theology to provide polarised images of womanhood, one to be avoided at all costs and the other ultimately unattainable, has had "devastating effects" upon Catholic womanhood according to Mary Daly (18). Out of the assumption that Mary is in all respects the quintessential model for ordinary women, Daly argues, a "whole fallacious process" has been set in motion, that of the "spinning of a 'theology of woman' out of Marian doctrine, in which process fantasy fills the void left by unknown historical fact and universalises with naïve abandon" (120). Many Catholic women, such as feminist theologian Mary Daly, are convinced that the construction of Mary as a benign and passive figure untouched by either sex or decay is a convenience created to keep women under the power of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and priests, and to perpetuate the myth of the God-given spiritual superiority of men which a non-historical interpretation of the Old Testament and Paul's New Testament letters to contemporary groups of Christians can be seen, so fortuitously, to support.
It is a mistake, however, to regard the misogyny that critics discern within the Catholic Church as a consciously willed exercise in repression, or to evaluate the present status of women within the Catholic Church without regard to its socio-historical background. To judge the early Christians by twentieth-century social standards would be both facile and unfair. In the light of modern medical knowledge and notions of human rights, the theology of the early Fathers will naturally be found sadly lacking in its attitudes toward several sectors within the human family, including women and slaves. Christianity was not born into a vacuum; each "pocket" of believers in the expanding world of early Christianity absorbed the teaching of Christ into an existing body of well-established idées fixes and reçues.

The early Christians built their faith and practice upon a foundation drawn from a variety of authorities and influences. Local customs (conventions which perhaps went unquestioned due to Christianity's pragmatic decision not to challenge the existing status quo), the many erroneous assumptions of contemporary medical science, and the confirming authority of the highly patriarchal Old Testament texts, provided a solid basis for the belief that women were, in most respects, inferior to men. The Apostle Paul's rather ambiguous advice to various young churches on the subject of sexuality also seemed to provide justification for the continued subjugation of women under the new covenant between God and humankind established by Christ's death and resurrection.

Thus, rather than being forced upon the faithful by the use of deliberate distortions of biblical exegesis and a deliberate intention to render women powerless, Catholic misogyny seems to have been based upon justifications which, in the light of the contemporary social and scientific knowledge of the time, seemed merely logical. Furthermore, the power with which such attitudes invest the male would be naturally difficult to relinquish once established.

Such a defence, however, does not justify the seeming reluctance of the institutional Church to adapt its teaching to incorporate both a more recent scientific understanding of sexuality and gender difference and the recent biblical exegesis of modern theologians. "The teaching
of Thomas Aquinas concerning women, which is still implicitly the doctrine of the Church is" according to a petition sent to the Second Vatican Council Fathers by Dr Gertrud Heinzelmann, "completely outdated" (Daly 82). However, the present situation regarding the status of women within the Church is proving difficult to change. Mary Daly argues that because women have been excluded from the power-wielding, decision-making hierarchy of the Church, “theologians – all male – have felt no pressure to give serious attention to the problems of the other sex in their struggle to achieve first class citizenship” (48). Furthermore, rebellion against the inequality they perceive within the Catholic Church is a "painful" process for Catholic women, since, as Rosemary Radford Reuther points out, “the Church has played a cultural role as parent, combining imagery of mother-church with the fatherhood of God, represented by priests.” However, to "seek [their] authentic human potential, Catholic women must “rebel against all that has hitherto claimed to nurture [them]" (Küng and Swidler, eds. 280).

The so-called “sexual revolution” of the 1960s that followed the introduction of the birth control pill brought dissatisfaction among Catholic women to a higher pitch since it threw into greater relief the already significant disparity between Catholic women and their Protestant and secular counterparts. The widespread availability of the birth control pill gave women a control over fertility and a subsequent freedom that had previously been the province of men. Furthermore, a growing feminist movement, both in England and America, was awakening women to the disparity between the rights of men and women in all spheres of life. Consequently, many Catholic women had been hoping that the Church would adapt its moral law to encompass the technology that had so improved the lives of women outside the Catholic fold.

However, when the documents of the Second Vatican council failed to sanction changes in moral law, and in 1968, Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* “reached into the bedroom of every Catholic married couple in the world” (Greeley 91) to expressly forbid
the use of artificial methods of birth control such as the pill, many Catholic women saw in the Church's refusal to sanction the use of the pill a deliberate ruse on the part of a male dominated Church hierarchy to restrict women's rights and to keep them confined to the kitchen and the nursery. They have been encouraged in this assumption not only by feminist influences from the secular world, but, as Ross Labrie puts it, by the disparity that they perceive between "the relatively subordinate role accorded to women in the Church and the lofty ideals of human dignity that have been enshrined in encyclicals and in official texts articulating the Catholic social vision" (12). Equally discouraging to Catholic women seeking greater recognition of their potential as human beings is the Church's insistence on referring in its texts to "the activities of women in accordance with their natural role" and in terms of their dependent relationships as daughters, wives, mothers and widows, rather than in terms of their "existent realities as human beings" (Morrisey 7-8).

One of the arguments frequently proffered in defence of the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church is that the emotional nature of women makes it difficult for them to be objective, which in turn renders them unsuitable for the business of deciding on issues of great universal importance. While agreeing that women's ways of perceiving reality are in some ways different from those of men and that the stages of a woman's life prompt the development of images of quite a different nature to those which result from male experience of the world, most modern feminists argue for the validation of women's methods of interpreting the world and for giving them equal status with the methods attributed to men.

In the introduction to their study, Women's Ways of Knowing, Mary Field Belenky et al quote from an article¹, in which E.E. Sampson suggests that "the commonly accepted stereotype of women's thinking as emotional, intuitive, and personalised has contributed to the devaluation of women's minds and contributions, particularly in Western technologically oriented cultures, which value rationalism and objectivity" (6). However, this stereotype is

¹ "Scientific Paradigm and Social Value: Wanted -- a Scientific Revolution," Journal of...
the legacy of more than two thousand years in which women have been marginalized in all areas of public life because their intuitive thinking has been erroneously equated with emotional instability and irrationality. Such a linking of women’s modes of interpreting and reacting to the world has led to their exclusion from positions of power within the Church because their perceived lack of the “male” qualities of rationality and objectivity somehow rendered them inferior to men in matters of virtue and spirituality. Furthermore, as Carolyn Heilbrun argues, "in the Judeo-Christian tradition, manliness has been raised to an ideal perceived as warriorlike, free of the "softer" virtues of nurturance and gentle affection." In order to maintain this half-fiction of manliness, men have found themselves unable to acknowledge these "softer virtues" within themselves, and have "relegated" them to the female sex, as "the other," and "have defined themselves as not women" (102).

According to this view, women have learned from men to define themselves according to characteristics which men have deemed inferior and to accept the supposed fact that "males have greater powers of rationality than females have" (Belenky 216-7). Having accepted their inferiority, they have learned to be silent and to adopt "an externally orientated perspective on truth" (54) constructed predominantly by males. During this century, however, and especially in the decades since the second World War which have been characterized by rapid economic and social changes, women in society at large have begun demanding a larger share of power, both in public and in private life, and have begun to challenge the traditional stereotypes which devalue their abilities, restrict their contribution to society, and provide the justification for perpetuating the myth of their inferior status. As Rosemary Radford Reuther notes, “as they become sensitized to questions of sexism, women perceive the Catholic Church not only as an institution that has been shaped by patriarchal society, but one which continues to play a major role in legitimating sexism both in the Church itself and in society” (279).

The voices of women who demand greater autonomy and a greater share in the structure and formation of Catholic tradition within the enclave of a largely patriarchal Church are well represented in recent fiction. Mary Gordon, for example, vividly portrays the struggle of Catholic women to emerge from the so-called “Catholic ghetto” into the mainstream of secular society. In the Catholic fiction of David Lodge, the evolution of his female characters from the restraints of prescribed roles to the freedom of individual reality can be clearly traced. From his traditional perspective, novelist Piers Paul Read attempts to defend the Church’s particular focus upon sexual sin, and to point out the pitfalls that face women who attempt to break away from traditional roles. Yet another approach is evident in the fiction of Anne Redmon who, in accordance with her incarnational approach to her faith, exemplifies the ways in which, in understanding and coming to terms with the sexual component of their nature, women are learning to rely increasingly "on their intuitive processes" in "an important adaptive move in the service of self-protection, self-assertion, and self-definition" (Belenky 54).

The Crisis in the modern Church

The struggle among Catholic women to acquire increased influence and greater freedom within the Catholic Church has grown out of a general call for change by liberal Catholics, who argue that moral behaviour ought to be a function of individual conscience rather than of the Church's one-size-fits-all wardrobe of moral law. According to Rosemary Radford Reuther, "this new sensitivity to sexism among Catholic women has paralleled the generally expanding critical consciousness after Vatican II" (279). Catholic moral law relies heavily upon the notion that central to human relationships is the concept of renunciation, and that, where desire conflicts with adherence to Church law, personal happiness in this world must be renounced in the interests of happiness in the next. The Catholic Church argues that "the love of spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses’ community of persons, which embraces their entire life" (Catechism of the Catholic Church...
Thus, it follows that, if either spouse becomes unhappy in the marriage, he or she is required by Catholic moral law to forego the possible happiness a change of partner might bring, or to risk the loss of his or her immortal soul through the grave sin of adultery. The Church stresses the need for sacrificial love within the bond of marriage by equating the love of husband and wife for each other with the love of Christ, who "gave himself up" in love for humanity. In practical terms, sacrificial love requires each of the partners in marriage to be prepared to put the needs of the other first, to forgive each other, and to remain faithful despite possible suffering and the inevitable arid periods in their lives together. This proviso requires them to avoid the temptation to seek gratification of unmet needs and appetites outside marriage. Clearly, married life within the Catholic understanding involves highly exacting standards of moral conduct, and it is not surprising that a frequent preoccupation of the Catholic novel is the way in which characters attempt, and often fail, to live out these imperatives in their everyday lives.

The Church also teaches that sexual intercourse is ordained for the physical expression of a married couple's love in a gift of themselves to each other, in exclusivity, and in order to produce children. Adultery is, therefore, "objectively wrong" in that it represents a betrayal of the marital value of mutual commitment of husband and wife to each other in intimate friendship, and of the value of procreation. Furthermore, as the Church takes seriously Jesus' express equation of divorce and remarriage with adultery, Catholics are denied the escape route allowed their secular and Protestant Christian neighbours when they consider their marriage to have irrevocably broken down. In condemning divorce, the Catholic Church emphasises the distinction between "erotic inclination" and "Christian conjugal love," arguing that the latter far exceeds the former in that the former, when "selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away" (The Teaching of Christ 499-500). Similarly, the Church continues to condemn all acts of sexual intercourse outside the bounds of holy matrimony as "contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality" (Catechism of the Catholic Church
regardless of circumstances.

Clearly, the gulf between Catholic and secular morality has widened considerably in the decades since the birth control pill became widely available, allowing greater sexual freedom in secular society where the main reason for sexual restraint had been the fear of unwanted pregnancy. As the gulf widened, Catholics began to hope for a change in Church moral law that would allow them a share in this freedom in terms of the right to regulate the size of their families using the birth control pill and other artificial methods of contraception. The Church's adamant refusal to permit use of the pill led to defiance by many Catholics, who decided to use the pill despite the Church's disapproval. Once Catholics had arrogated church authority regarding the use of "artificial" methods of birth control, however, it was only a matter of time before liberal Catholics began to question Church authority in general, and to argue for greater autonomy of conscience in other spheres of Catholic life.

At the heart of the present crisis in the Catholic Church is the tension between the concept of the supremacy of individual conscience (which the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council had seemed to encourage) and the absolute authority claimed by the institutional Church on matters of moral law. Simply put, Catholics are divided between the Church's claim to absolute authority in matters of moral law and the moral relativism upon which secular morality is based. Supporters of the liberal side of the controversy question the right of the Church to insist upon adherence to rigid rules of sexual behaviour which do not take into account unique circumstances. Furthermore, many liberal Catholics contend that recent rapid increases in scientific knowledge concerning human sexuality undermine the validity of Church law, some of which is influenced by - if not founded upon - the erroneous scientific assumptions of the Church Fathers on the subject of human sexuality. Traditionalists maintain, however, that once Catholics begin to choose from among the tenets of moral law as if from a menu, the door will be opened to the hedonism that they believe characterizes contemporary secular society.
To borrow Gilbert Harmon's simple definition, 'moral relativism' is the claim that "there is no single true morality," but that "there are many different moral frameworks, none of which is more correct than the others" (5). Such a claim would seem to suggest that one may as well choose to act according to the morality which provides the greatest pleasure, or the greatest convenience, if no one morality is truer, or better, than another. From the traditionalist camp, the English novelist Piers Paul Read accuses of 'moral relativism' those who seek to arrogate the moral authority of the Church. He uses the term pejoratively to denote the tendency of many Catholics to employ the concept of 'moral relativism' in order to excuse their indulgence in the "liberal hedonistic spirit," of secular society, as he puts it in his article, "Decline and Fall of the Catholic Novel" (20). Read fears that, in changing the locus of authority in the making of moral decisions from the Church to the individual, often with the encouragement of parish priests, Catholics are in danger of losing sight of the important precept of Catholicism which teaches that salvation requires obedience to Church law despite any hardship and unhappiness it may involve. For Read, moral relativism seems to be synonymous with the "liberal hedonistic spirit," which in turn leads to "subjective moral judgements" (20). The moral sophistry inherent in relativism, Read postulates, will leach the Catholic novel of "a rich source of its drama," which is the struggle of the individual to apply the "dogmatic certainties" of pre-conciliar Catholicism in the arena of compromise in which human life is lived out. Liberal Catholics who oppose this view, however, believe themselves sufficiently capable of deciding for themselves the moral implications of a given act according to the dictates of individual conscience. They are not dismayed by the fact that the role of the Church as mediator between God and the individual will be weakened if Catholics choose to obey their consciences rather than Church moral law.

According to the simple definition provided by Gilbert Harmon, 'moral relativism' does seem to involve the danger of overlooking the fact that the rightness or wrongness of a given act depends upon a "system of moral co-ordinates" (13) and not merely upon one's appetites.
and desires of the moment. Critics of the liberal Catholics' proclivity for making subjective moral judgements fear that these Catholics tend to forget that their moral choices have eternal implications which subjective judgements often do not take into account. Moral relativism need not be assumed to give the agent carte blanche to follow his or her whim, however. It presupposes a set of values in which the given act is framed. While it is true that an "an act can be right with respect to one system of moral coordinates and wrong with respect to another system of coordinates" (Harmon 13), the individual who seeks to behave morally rather than according to the whim of the moment will adhere consistently to one framework of coordinates rather than choosing from a variety of systems in order to justify personal pleasure.

Read places the blame for the loss of dogmatic certainty (which marked the pre-conciliar Church) and the subsequent loss of the distinctive Catholic vision of the world upon the laity, which he suggests has failed to resist the appeal of moral relativism. In lamenting the "failure" of the papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* to address the current needs of the laity, however, Harman Grisewood seems to attribute at least part of the blame for the widening breach between the institutional Church and the laity upon the Church's "reiteration of the old [pre-conciliar] code" (Tablet 287) in which "the spirit was exalted and the body degraded" (286). Rather than suggesting that the Catholic laity has been seduced by the modern "hedonistic spirit," he argues that the liberal Catholic's "disregard [of Church authority] is not on account of laxity nor self-indulgence; it is by the painful exercise of conscience, often in fear and trembling" (287). They have espoused, in other words, a carefully applied moral relativism in which they make conscientious decisions according to carefully constructed sets of moral coordinates. This difference of opinion as to where the blame lies for the crisis in the post-conciliar Church, so clearly set out in the opinions of Grisewood and Read, is addressed in the Catholic novels of recent decades as Catholic writers weave into their fiction the complex problems and dilemmas of modern life. Writers such as Read lay the blame upon
late twentieth century secular society with its emphasis upon pleasure, convenience, and ease, against which the Church's doctrine of renunciation and restraint is hard put to compete. Others, such as David Lodge and Mary Gordon, attribute the fault to the inability of the Church to keep pace with the needs of modern Catholics, and to its habit of issuing encyclicals and decrees which reiterate out-dated understandings of human life. With Harman Grisewood, these novelists believe that "the norms and revisions [of the Catholic faith in the future] will not be established by encyclicals and decrees, but by Christian practice, by Christian consciences and by Christian love" (287).

Read and his fellow traditionalists are greatly outnumbered by the large numbers of Catholics who have claimed the right to decide for themselves in matters of morality, especially with regard to sexual behaviour. While the sacraments as channels for God's grace remain an important aspect of Catholic practice, the circumstances and conditions of their reception are largely decided by individual Catholics themselves, rather than according to the rules of the catechism. Divorced and remarried Catholics no longer feel it necessary to deny themselves full participation in communion, Catholic couples regulate the size of their families using modern methods of birth control, and young Catholics happily live together in what the Church considers to be "mortal sin." Liberal Catholics would argue that the increase in honest, thoughtful, prayerful use of the precepts of moral relativism is a sign that in the last half of the twentieth century the Catholic conscience has at last come of age, forced to "grow up" rather quickly in response to the Church's refusal to put aside outdated notions of sexual morality. However, in the main, the modern Catholic novel depicts the same struggle to live the moral life as it had done during the days of dogmatic certainty. Only the battleground has changed. The struggle seems now to be conducted between the individual and his or her own conscience, against a backdrop of the individual's own understanding of God's will, understood within the parameters of a broadly Catholic conception of morality.
The "Catholic" Novel in the Twentieth Century

The term "Catholic novel" is a coinage of the first half of the twentieth century first used in discussion of the works of such writers as G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc in order to distinguish novels informed by a distinctively Catholic vision from the general category of the novel. As a literary genre that was born out of the tension between the Protestant ethic and Capitalist ideology, the novel in its infancy was heavily didactic. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* are apt examples of the early novelists' assumed mandate to edify as well as to entertain. However, even as recently as 1939, Catholic commentators such as Robert C. Broderick were arguing for the importance of apologetics in Catholic literature. Broderick suggested that the Catholic writer has a purpose to fulfil in bringing about Catholic action. It must remain true that every piece of writing by a Catholic, whether it is a novel or only an essay, must necessarily be apologetic in some respect. This is not by purpose or intent but because of the clash of Catholic truth upon other opinions. The standard for Catholic authors should be such that through their art Catholic morality is presented not only to Catholic readers but to non-Catholics as well. (130)

For critics such as Broderick, moral imperatives clearly take precedence over aesthetic considerations, although the play between the moral and the aesthetic need not be problematic, as the novels of Anne Redmon (particularly *Music and Silence*) show very effectively. Clearly, if writing today, Broderick would take issue with the large number of Catholic novelists who treat less of Catholic moral certainty than of the doubts and questions of modern Catholics and who seldom supply definitive and orthodox solutions. Thomas J. Fitzmorris would be equally appalled by the insistent focus of the contemporary Catholic novel upon sexuality. In 1935, Fitzmorris wrote an article, entitled "Formula for the Great American Catholic Novel," in which he argued that "the most troublesome element, the gaping pitfall of the modern novel" is "human love," and that "too often it is caricatured and what otherwise would have been a novel becomes so many pornographic pages." He exhorted Catholic writers to "by all means write of love but, for the love of God, leave 'sex' alone!" (426). Only Anne Redmon, of the four Catholic novelists discussed in this study, could hope to meet with
the approval of these commentators whose opinions are typical of attitudes toward Catholic literature before the Second World War.

Thomas Woodman argues that, at least until the late thirties, Catholic fiction gave an impression of "refusing to engage with contemporary realities" (28), and tended to be narrowly didactic. However, although there is a clearly discernible trend in Catholic fiction away from the kind of apologetics which characterized the Catholic fiction of the earlier part of the century, one must be careful to avoid the kind of generalization which sees all Catholic novelists at or before the second Vatican Council as dogmatically orthodox and all those writing since as out and out liberals. Graham Greene, for example, can hardly be termed orthodox, even in as early a novel as Brighton Rock (1938), while the contemporary novelist Piers Paul Read writes from an orthodox point of view and has frequently been criticized for didacticism. While it is, indisputably, a great work, Evelyn Waugh’s 1944 novel, Brideshead Revisited, seems to me to mark the end of a sub-genre that might be called the Catholic novel of apologetics, while Greene begins a new strain of Catholic novel less concerned with apologetics than with the writer’s doubts and difficulties vis à vis the Catholic faith. Both Waugh’s and Greene’s novels focus upon those aspects of Catholicism that make the Catholic a kind of exotic outsider in the face of secular values. Greene’s novels, however, tend to question rather than to affirm Catholic moral law, and for this reason he might be said to be the first of a new school of Catholic novelists whose work reflects the questions rather than the certainties of its characters. In Brighton Rock, The Heart of the Matter, and The End of the Affair, Greene’s characters are set apart by their distinctively Catholic understanding of the moral universe, yet Greene’s treatment of their concerns is tentative and exploratory. He has none of Waugh’s dogmatic certainty. The increasing agnosticism which Read discerns in Greene’s later novels might be more accurately characterized as the growing preoccupation in his characters with the blind spots, silences, and anomalies which the questioning Catholic must acknowledge and confront. Greene’s characters become less agnostic, in the sense of
questioning the very existence of God, than Job-like. They cry out against the seeming caprice of a God who, most of the time, (unlike Waugh's God), leaves humankind to struggle alone. The struggles which Greene's characters undergo, his Querries, Scobies, and his priests, have paved the way for subsequent Catholic novelists from both sides of the Atlantic to focus upon the uncertainties of contemporary Catholics.

The change of focus from a "closed ranks" variety of Catholic apologetics to a frank reflection in fiction of the problems and questions with which modern Catholics are concerned has brought with it a change in the way female characters are portrayed. Female characters are less often constructed in contemporary Catholic fiction in terms of their prescribed and "God-ordained" roles and increasingly in terms of their individual reality, independent of traditional expectations of function and position. This movement has involved a shift in emphasis from renunciation as a central requirement of the Catholic life to a self-fulfilment which Piers Paul Read equates with the "liberal hedonistic spirit" which characterises modern society in which "moral relativism is the norm" (20).

The widespread arrogation by lay Catholics of the right to decide matters of morality according to the dictates of individual conscience is reflected in the way in which each of the four writers whose fiction is the subject of this study weaves into his or her fiction a uniquely personal vision of the Catholic faith. The novels of David Lodge, for example, reflect Lodge's personal journey from unreflecting orthodoxy to considered liberalism. As Lodge moves from orthodoxy to liberalism, his focus shifts from the traditional Catholic concept of renunciation toward a liberal emphasis upon the more secular value of self -fulfilment. Consequently, he tends more and more to depict his female characters less in terms of what the Church deems their "natural" roles than in terms of their individual realities. Mary Gordon's novels explore the struggle that many Catholic women undergo in order to throw off stereotypical notions of women's roles and relationships to men. While for Lodge, however, the issue of misogyny within the Catholic Church is less an issue than the sexual emancipation of Catholic laity as a
whole, Mary Gordon's "ardent feminism" (lanonne 62) is fundamental to her work. As Carol lanonne quotes Gordon as having said, "feminist comes nearest to Catholicism as an informing framework of values" (62). It is fair to say, in fact, that Gordon's fiction represents an ongoing attempt to blend the two ideologies into a workable synthesis. Writing from a traditional point of view, Piers Paul Read also addresses the complaints of many Catholic women regarding the restrictions they feel the institutional Church imposes upon them. However, unlike Mary Gordon, whose novels represent revisions in fiction of what she sees as outdated notions of morality, Read argues for the validity of traditional Catholic mores while attempting to construct a compassionate and compelling metaphysic to soften what may look like the inhuman intransigence of Catholic moral law. Anne Redmon, an American who frequently gives her novels an English setting, avoids becoming embroiled in the controversy between liberal Catholics and those who espouse a return to stricter obedience to Church authority by focusing upon the unhappiness which misinterpretation of Catholic moral values brings down upon her protagonists.

In his article, "Decline and Fall of the Catholic Novel," Piers Paul Read provides an apt example of the shift in the modern Catholic novel from a focus upon renunciation which obedience to Church moral authority had entailed, to a reliance upon subjective judgements which blur the distinction between good and evil, creating "sophistical moral conundrums" which enable the individual to justify personal sin. Read compares the moral choices of Sarah Miles in Graham Greene's 1951 novel, The End of the Affair and those of Julia Flyte in Evelyn Waugh's novel, set in the 1940s, Brideshead Revisited, with the hero of David Lodge's 1995 novel, Therapy. After promising God that she will give up her lover if God will spare his life during an air raid, Sarah Miles renounces her adulterous relationship and offers up the pain of her separation from her lover to God. Similarly, Julia Flyte realizes as a result of her father's deathbed repentance that she cannot marry Charles Ryder since both he and she have been married before. To marry him would be considered adultery in the eyes of the Church, and
therefore, to choose Ryder would be to "set up a rival good to God's." She explains to Ryder, "if I give up this one thing I want so much, however bad I am, He won't quite despair of me in the end" (340). In marked contrast to Waugh's Julia and Greene's Sarah, Lodge's impenitent hero, Laurence "Tubby" Passmore, makes love from time to time with a middle-aged married woman who had been his girlfriend in his youth. The woman, Maureen, has had a mastectomy as a result of cancer. Read argues in his article that Tubby's justification for his adultery (both he and Maureen are married) is arrived at through moral relativism. He argues that, according to Lodge, "the compassion expressed in this act transcends any sin that might once have been considered implicit in the adulterous act "(20). Thus, what Read is describing is a progression in Catholic fiction from an acceptance, as in these characters of Waugh and Greene, of an externally imposed moral code, to an refutation of the power invested in the institutional Church in favour of individual conscience and moral relativism, as in Lodge's *Therapy.*

All interpretations, whether or not the writer insists upon his or her "orthodoxy," are of course filtered through lenses more or less distorted by personal experience and individual temperament. However, recent writers have more openly and unashamedly provided a personal, often unorthodox, vision of the faith. Some of these writers, such as Mary Gordon, despite her claim that the "sexy people" must leave the Church, incorporate an element of "apology" in their novels by providing a modified version of the faith which assures the reader that a practice of the faith is possible without obedience to what they see as anachronisms in Church moral law and intrusions by the institutional Church into the personal lives of Catholics. In her article, "The Secret of Mary Gordon's Success," Carol Iannone wryly calls such modifications "Miss Gordon's improvements on traditional morality" (63).

Despite her tendency to revise traditional Catholicism, however, Gordon looks back with nostalgia to pre-Vatican II forms of worship and piety so comfortably familiar and reminiscent of her childhood. Other writers, such as David Lodge, have also woven into their
fiction the doubts, difficulties and contradictions with which they struggle in their own lives and in their own conceptions of the faith. Rachel Billington, for example, provides Catholic notions of the action of grace with a personal twist by suggesting that God transforms the hearts and lives of secular individuals through the actions (good and evil) of others but without necessarily herding these transformed individuals into the arms of the institutional Church. Despite their willingness to venture into the areas of rebellion and doubt which preoccupy modern Catholics, each of the writers whose work is discussed in this study reveals in their novels an affection for the Church which is in serious crisis as the century comes to an end.
Chapter II

David Lodge

The Catholic novels of David Lodge provide a useful starting point for an examination of the changes in attitude and practice which have taken place among the laity in the decades since the Second Vatican Council. Despite the fact that his central characters are most often male, Lodge provides, in a succession of female characters, interesting depictions of the recent awakening of consciousness of many Catholic women to inequalities which seem to point to an underlying misogyny within the Catholic Church. While it is true that recent developments in the evolution of the Church are mirrored in the novels of other Catholic writers on both sides of the Atlantic, these developments are particularly well traced in Lodge's novels since his work spans the period of crisis within the Catholic Church with which this study is concerned, and reflects the changing views of both Lodge himself and Catholic laity in general. Lodge has undergone a personal journey from the Catholic orthodoxy of his youth -- "if you were practising, you were ipso facto orthodox in the 1950s" (Picturegoers viii) -- to the theological liberalism of his mature years. This evolution in his own faith is mirrored in the lives of a succession of characters in his novels, providing a vivid portrait of English Catholicism, its crises and controversies, in the latter half of the century. Particularly well portrayed in Lodge's fiction is the shift among lay Catholics from obedience to institutional Church law, with its emphasis upon self-renunciation, to a reliance upon individual conscience and self-fulfilment. Particularly clearly traced in Lodge's fiction is the gradual separation of the sexual act from its procreative and spiritual connotations in the minds of his characters. In Lodge's earliest Catholic novel, sexual activity outside marriage is viewed from the point of view of orthodox Catholicism as serious sin. In Paradise News and Therapy, however, Lodge's characters flout traditional Catholic morality by entering into sexual relationships which are based on companionship, compassion and the giving and receiving of mutual pleasure.

In his earliest published Catholic novel, The Picturegoers, Lodge focuses mainly upon
the sociological aspects of the lives of Catholics in Protestant Britain, particularly upon the restrictions that Catholics experience as a result of Church moral law concerning sexual attitudes and behaviour. As in each of Lodge's early Catholic novels, in *The Picturegoers*, much of the humour is derived from the disjuncture between Catholic moral law and secular values. Although each of Lodge's novels is imbued with Lodge's sharp sense of the telling details of social history, they also show an increasing preoccupation with the spiritual lives of his characters and with the issues of Church law and dogma which both divide Catholics and, in the past, kept them isolated from their Protestant and secular neighbours. Lodge's focus gradually shifts from the largely sociological to a greater concern with his characters' struggle to reconcile the absolutes of the Catholic faith with the inevitable compromises of their daily lives. The difficulties of his characters and the solutions which they adopt increasingly reflect the questions which the laity had begun to ask with greater and greater urgency during the decade before the Second Vatican Council, and which formed the bases for doubts which in turn led to rebellion among lay Catholics during in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Lodge's novels consistently focus upon such matters as marital fidelity, extra-marital sex, and birth control, as he traces the changes in attitude and behaviour among predominantly working-class English Catholics.

A comparison between the central female character of Lodge's first Catholic novel, *The Picturegoers*, and Maureen, the lover of his anti-hero, Tubby, in Lodge's latest Catholic novel, *Therapy*, shows how great an evolution in self-conception has taken place among Catholic women during the decades since Lodge began his career as a novelist. In *Therapy*, the importance of renunciation, which is strongly present and largely uncontested in *The Picturegoers*, is superseded by the more liberal notion of the right to personal choice and self-fulfilment, particularly in sexual matters. In *Picturegoers*, Clare, the young ex-nun, epitomizes the stereotype of a young Catholic woman from the decade immediately before the Second Vatican Council, as she struggles to resist the sexual overtures of her lapsed Catholic boyfriend, while Maureen, Tubby's middle-aged married lover, represents the liberated Catholic woman of
the 1990s. Maureen breaks free from traditional notions of gender and role, which are based upon qualities considered to be peculiar to women, and from the constraints of Catholic moral law, with its emphasis on renunciation and self-denial, in order to realize her sexual needs with Tubby outside the confines of her disintegrating marriage. However, as Bernard Bergonzi points out, Maureen does not abandon her Catholic values altogether. Although "her conscience is accommodating enough to let her sleep with Tubby from time to time," she will not "consider divorce" despite the lovelessness of her marriage" (David Lodge 46). From a liberal viewpoint, Maureen can be envisioned as the woman that Clare will later become.

In the introduction to the 1993 Penguin reprint of The Picturegoers, which he wrote over several years during the 1950s and published in 1960, Lodge expresses surprise at "the prominence of its religious element, and the seriousness with which the hero's conversion is treated" (Introduction viii). In the light of what Lodge terms his "present demythologized, provisional, and in many ways agnostic theological perspective," the novel seems to Lodge "like the work of another person" (ix). Lodge attributes the novel's serious religious aspect to the influence of Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, François Mauriac, and Georges Bernanos, rather than to any religious experience of his own. Lodge's faith was at this early point in his career a matter of unreflective practice rather than of personal experience. The growing scepticism of his mature years, which Lodge seems to attribute equally to education and experience, had not yet created in him a need to put a distance between himself and orthodox practice. Perhaps it is this distancing which has gradually brought into focus for him the fact that many of the assumptions about female role and behaviour have their roots in what many feminists see as misogyny masquerading as theology.

As Lodge has pointed out, The Picturegoers provides a portrait of "a lost world," an England with "social practices and linguistic usages that now seem quaintly archaic" (ix). Its depiction of working-class life in the 1950s is both witty and poignant. The novel is structured around the cinema as "both institution and medium" (x) and it is their Saturday-nightly visits to
the cinema that link together the novel's characters, who have little else in common. The primary focus of the novel is the romance between Mark Underwood, a young undergraduate and would-be writer from London University, and Clare Mallory, a young ex-postulant whose combination of innocence and voluptuousness both attracts and challenges him. Mark, a lapsed Catholic, is a lodger in the Mallorys' solidly Catholic home. The Mallory family, with its large cast of family members, together with a variety of "picturegoers," including the family's parish priest, provides supporting roles in what is, predominantly, a bildungsroman depicting the story of Mark's return to the Catholic fold.

While the focus of The Picturegoers is Mark's gradual spiritual reawakening, equally interesting is Clare's movement in the opposite direction as the sombre shadow of Mark's religious rebirth. As Mark is transformed from a cynical young lecher to an aspirant to the religious life, Clare begins to questions the assumptions and strict laws of conduct that govern her life as a Catholic. Lodge has quipped that as a novel constructed around a sequence of several visits to the cinema on Saturday evenings and attendances at mass on Sunday morning, the novel might have been called Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. However, while the novel certainly shares the sociological preoccupations of the "angry young men" of the 1950s, from the point of view of its theological content, Lodge might have chosen a title which he was later to use for one of his academic novels: Changing Places. As Clare, the young ex-nun ruefully points out to Mark, Lodge's young hero, at their parting, "Now I'm like you, you're like I used to be. It's like a seesaw: one side goes up, one side goes down. That's me gone down I suppose. I suppose we were once dead level, but I don't especially remember it" (202). As the novel recounts their movement, first toward and then away from each other, its narrative tension is grounded in the contrast between the distinctly Catholic notion of sacrifice and renunciation according to which life in the Mallory household is conducted, and the secular value of immediate gratification depicted in large upon the cinema screen.

The character of Amber Lush, the secular Hollywood heroine of the first film seen by the
picturegoers, places her at the opposite end of the female spectrum from the Blessed Virgin, and from Clare, whose Catholic upbringing has conditioned her to emulate as closely as possible Mary's meek demeanour and sexual purity. Amber Lush's evident and exaggerated curves bespeak her generous attitude toward sexuality. On screen she comports herself with a libertine abandon which both outrages and titillates the Mallorys' parish priest, who visits the cinema in the mistaken belief that the movie *Bernadette* is to be screened. Amber is proud of her body, "exploiting its disturbing properties by every gesture and art of dress" (67). Thus, the juxtaposed figures of the secular idol, Amber Lush and the felt presence and influence of the Catholic "arch-heroine," Mary, imperfectly fleshed out in the character of Clare, provide both thematically and formally the posts between which the body of the novel is strung.

A prominent aspect of the inheritance passed on by the mid-century Catholic novelists, whose influence, Lodge admits, played a part in the writing of *The Picturegoers*, is the notion that Catholic life necessitates a willingness to renounce worldly pleasure -- particularly sensual gratification -- in obedience to the moral dictates of the Church. Notions such as this, so blatantly countered by Amber Lush, set Catholics apart from their more secular neighbours. Clare's faith seems to epitomize Lodge's conception of Catholic piety and practice in mid-century England. Lodge's portrayal of Clare illustrates the notion that the practice of Catholic orthodoxy in the 1950s was, especially for women, very much a matter of filling an institutionally prescribed role. Clare is so firmly entrenched in notions of Catholic maidenhood that she denies aspects of herself which do not conform to the stereotype. Her vocation as a nun, for example, had been put in doubt when she became involved in a close friendship with a girl she had taught in the convent, a relationship in which her sensual nature had sought expression under the guise of mutual spiritual support.

As is the case for several of Anne Redmon's heroines, love for a member of her own sex seems to be, for Clare, a preparation for heterosexual love. However, while Redmon seems to suggest that sexual desire is a component of the highest kind of love, regardless of the sex of
the recipient, Lodge's point seems to be that sexuality cannot be repressed completely, even in the "unnatural" circumstances of monastic life, but will attach itself to whomever is available. In Clare's case, since in the convent she is denied the companionship of male friends, her sexuality seeks an outlet in her close friendship with a young student for whom she feels both affection and compassion. After recounting the "affair" to Mark in language that is redolent with the memory of a sensuality denied, she concludes: "we thought we could help each other to be good -- in a spiritual way, I mean." Clare's Catholic training constrains her to emphasize the spiritual nature of her relationship with Hilda. It is important to her that Mark understand that the relationship had been pure, uncontaminated by the unclean desires of the flesh. Its basis in spirituality, which is traditionally considered to be the mode of male friendships, gives the relationship a gravity and respectability that romantic infatuation would lack. However, what had begun as an innocent friendship gradually "began to get out of control," (152) until, finally, Clare and her pupil had been discovered and asked to leave the convent. Despite her strong attachment to Hilda, however, and the subsequent disgrace it had brought upon them both, Clare does not seem to realize that the affair had been the result of the lack of a means of expression for her sensuality in the religious life.

Having had the vocation of the religious denied her and after leaving the confines of the convent for the outside world, in traditional fashion Clare prepares to assume another institutionally approved role, that of the chaste bride: "Marriage had now come to occupy the same central position in her mind as religion had formerly: on it all her hopes were based" (147). In this role Clare continues to view her relationships in spiritual terms. She had justified her relationship with her pupil Hilda with the thought that she could "help her spiritually, perhaps show her that she had a vocation too" (152), and rather than retreat from Mark and the danger he represents, Clare justifies their relationship in precisely the same terms. Clare's motives are not entirely self-deceptive, however. She honestly believes that by leading Mark back to the Catholic fold she will somehow regain her own religious fervour. Lost in the aftermath of her
"love affair" with Hilda -- she continues doggedly to see herself in missionary guise, and longs to be a participant in, not merely a spectator of, [Mark's] rediscovery of the Catholic faith" (37-38). Of course, this will involve a dangerous but delicious physical contact, but all in a good cause.

As with the American writer Mary Gordon's heroines, Isabel and Felicity, in Final Payments and The Company of Women, who are discussed in the following chapter, Clare emerges from the Catholic "ghetto" sadly ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of the modern world. She has been taught to tackle moral dilemmas in terms of the absolutes of right and wrong, and nothing in her cloistered existence, even her friendship with Hilda, has prepared Clare for the subtle threat which Mark represents. She is half-aware of what is made perfectly clear to the reader, that Mark finds the combination in her of voluptuous abundance and childlike innocence an irresistible challenge. Covertly observing her upon her knees as she recites the evening rosary with her family, Mark sees that Clare's face [is] as smooth and clean as sand left by the receding tide, a face in which devout concentration had appeared without a trace of self-righteousness. Nevertheless, the warm, full lines of the body, suggested rather than revealed by her unflattering dress, the shapely bosom, full hips and long legs, seemed intended for something better than praying, traditionally the plain girl's substitute for sex. (51)

Mark's perception of Clare and her view of herself are clearly opposed. Just as Mark cannot resist both the challenge she represents to his ego and the promise of her body to his libido, Clare cannot resist the opportunity to reclaim Mark for the Church, especially as it would "[give] her desires a certain respectability" (103). Mark, however, is far more sophisticated than Clare. He knows that "like a trout, she could be caught by very skilfully and delicately tickling her religious susceptibility" (103). He realizes that Clare's love for him has awakened her sexuality and that she has unconsciously subsumed her unacceptable feelings in missionary zeal, rationalizing that rule of thumb moral theology would indicate that she should give up Mark's company. But Mark wasn't just a disturbing influence; he was an unhappy boy without a faith. To give him up now would be cowardly -- there was an element of risk in everything worth the attempt. Of course she would only be a medium for God's grace, but unworthy as
she was, she might represent Mark's last chance of salvation. (98)

It seems that Mark has merely to dangle the irresistible bait of his return to the practice of his abandoned faith and reel her in.

The danger to Clare's virtue comes not only from Mark, but also from within Clare herself in the shape of a steadily eroding faith. The loss of her vocation and a resulting spiritual numbness have left Clare with only the outward evidence of her faith, its rituals and practice, and without the certainty and strength it had previously provided. In her spiritual struggle, Clare reminds the reader of the adulterous wife Clare, in Piers Paul Read's novel, *A Married Man*, who finds that the automatic and half-hearted practice of her faith during the early years of her marriage does not enable her to develop the kind of spiritual strength that will help her to resist the temptation of sexual sin. Similarly, when Mark's embraces produce in Clare Mallory a physical response that suggests a deeply sensual aspect to her nature, with so little real experience of romantic relationships, she falls back upon the rules of moral conduct she had learned in catechism class, rules which she finds woefully inadequate now that her virtue is under attack. In trying to reconcile the absolutes of Catholic moral law with the complexities of her own situation and her inevitably mixed motives, she becomes caught up in a web of doubts and scruples which increase her confusion and drain her relationship with Mark of its pleasure. What she had learned by rote has not prepared her for

what she was experiencing at present -- the strange traffic of hours of worry and misery for an occasional moment's happiness, the need to be with him all the time, and the need to disguise that need, the constant embarrassment of not knowing whether she was being too forward or too cold, whether she was welcoming occasions of sin, or, as Mark had hinted more than once, dragging the convent watchfulness into ordinary life, where it strangled innocent pleasure. (60)

The rules, set out so clearly in black and white are not easy to apply in the arena of human activity, where romantic love and sexual desire tend to cloud the issues.

Clare's seemingly irresolvable anxiety finds an outlet in a strong resentment against the Church whose rules seem inadequate for the situation in which she now finds herself. She wonders "whether the Catholic moral code [isn't] just a tedious and complicated game with which
theologians [amuse] themselves at the expense of ordinary people's happiness” (98). In these thoughts, Clare gives form to what becomes a recurring theme in the fiction of David Lodge, the idea of Catholicism, with its rules designed to cover every aspect of human endeavour, as a kind of game. The tenets of faith of most Christian sects involve a system of rules designed to enable the adherent who obeys to reach an eternal reward. However, the sheer complexity of Catholic rules of behaviour make the scruples which torment Clare as she follows the nightly ritual of examining her conscience a particularly Catholic form of suffering:

Was it wrong of Mark to put his hand [on her breast]? Was it wrong of her to like it? Had she liked it before she broke away? Had she broken away because it was wrong, or because of the noise at the window? Should she be angry with him? Or couldn't he be expected to know better -- was it really her fault that it had happened? ... Should she go to communion tomorrow? Well, it couldn't be a mortal sin because there hadn't been full knowledge or full consent. (9)

Such minute deliberations, not only upon whether or not one had sinned at all but upon the gravity of the sin, venial, serious, or mortal, are what led Lodge, in a later novel entitled How Far Can You Go? to explain the "metaphysical world picture" that young Catholics in the 1950s acquired through their religious education as a game much like Snakes and Ladders:

Up there was Heaven; down there was Hell. The name of the game was Salvation, the object to get to Heaven and avoid Hell . . . sin sent you plummeting down towards the pit; the sacraments, good deeds, acts of self-mortification, enabled you to climb back towards the light. Everything you did was subject to spiritual accounting. It was either good, bad, or indifferent. (6)

In view of the eternal consequences of this "game," it is crucial for Clare to decide the seriousness of the sin to which her closeness to Mark might lead her. Indeed, she realizes that she may find herself between a rock and a hard place, since her desire to lead Mark back to the Catholic fold might constitute the serious sin of spiritual pride rather than missionary virtue, and submission to his embraces in the course of her attempts to convert him would constitute a sin serious enough to separate her from God and result in her dispatch to hell if she died before she had confessed and received absolution for it. In her struggle to resist Mark's attempts to make love to her and to suppress her own desire for him, Clare begins to understand what experience
has taught so many young Catholics, that "Catholic guilt is not always strong enough to prevent a young person from having sex. But it can be strong enough to surround the event with anguish and confusion" (Saunders 56). Such confusion focuses the individual upon his or her motives rather than upon the feelings that prompt behaviour and, because of this, self-knowledge remains out of reach. Such anguished self-scrutiny, which seems to belong to pre-conciliar Catholicism in which the threat of hell was still taken with deathly seriousness by the majority of Catholics, is also a dominant characteristic of the Catholic heroines of Anne Redmon’s novels as they struggle to discover the source of the sense they have of having sinned.

Strict rules of conduct in regard to sexual behaviour are not, of course, exclusive to Catholicism. The adherents of many other religions and most of the Protestant sects are brought up to view sexual sin as seriously as Catholics of Clare’s generation, and it is not uncommon for adults who have "survived" such training to claim that their lives have been damaged by its effects. As Kate Saunders and Peter Stanford have pointed out, Catholic notions of the sinfulness of liberal sexuality, and particularly that women and their flesh are the "carriers" of this deadly disease, have, "over the centuries . . . bled into society at large" (39), so that people who espouse no particular religious creed define “respectability” in terms of adherence to strict rules for feminine sexual continence. Such ideas are eagerly absorbed into the prevailing male-dominated secular ideology since they serve to maintain the status quo by keeping in the background women and their distracting bodies, and by providing a target for blame when commonly held moral laws are transgressed.

Despite her resolve to resist Mark’s advances and her fear of hell, however, Clare’s determination weakens as Mark moves away from her and along an opposing trajectory. As his persistence lessens, Clare begins to encourage what she had, in the days of his ardour, viewed as liberties. As Clare reflects, "her drop had sent him soaring into religiosity" (146). His growing response to the promptings of his spiritual self brings in its wake a sense of loathing for the
game of cat and mouse he is waging with Clare. In fact, in a moment of extreme disgust, Mark envisions the game in more brutal, predatory terms: “You could always tell a respectable girl. Their bodies could be mapped out like butcher's charts showing the different cuts of meat. You could only touch certain parts before marriage. Touch one of the forbidden areas -- breast, rump or loin, and you encountered resistance” (92). Such thoughts, against a symbolic backdrop of noises from the “overworked lavatory” next to his bedroom, strip Mark's behaviour toward Clare of its rakish and romantic veneer so that he sees it for what it is – the stalking of a female by a male animal. Nauseated, Mark turns to prayer as a means to "cleanse" himself.

The turning point in the struggle between Clare and Mark is, ironically, anti-climactic, as Mark rejects Clare's symbolic surrender to desire: "Without warning, something gave inside her, like some part of a dam long under unsuspected strain. . . . She wanted to pull him down with her. . . . Seizing his hand, she kissed it, and thrust it under her raincoat and pressed it to her bosom. For a moment she felt his fingers cup her breast\(^1\), then he snatched his hand away" (153-4). As are many men whose sexual fantasies feed upon images of female modesty and reluctance overcome by masterful, suave, and seductive male power, Mark is unmanned by Clare's sudden capitulation, her unexpected and most immodest taking of the initiative. Mark's ambivalence is clearly evident in the sudden deflation of his desire for Clare when she slips out of her role as chaste and beautiful virgin and behaves as if she were Amber Lush. In her pain and confusion at Mark's rejection, Clare falls back upon the familiar categories of her faith. She chooses to see herself as "the self-sacrificing heroine, encouraging the man she loved in his spiritual aspirations" (200). Yet now that Clare has achieved what she had set out to do, she is reluctant to "cheerfully accept the sacrifice" (199) which would mean giving up Mark to his vocation in the Church.

\(^1\) The female breast becomes, in the fiction of David Lodge, a symbol of feminine generosity and selflessness. This is another point of similarity Lodge shares with the American writer, Mary Gordon, whose fiction is discussed in the following chapter.
Just as Mark has been changed by Clare's goodness, Clare has been changed under Mark's influence. He has awakened in her a sense of the possibilities for both pleasure and generosity which sexuality seems to offer. It is her goodness, ironically, that has made Clare vulnerable. She has discovered that the dictum, "love thy neighbour" is "dangerous advice" because "love was like a bus driven by a child: the more passengers, the more fatalities" (208).

Furthermore, Clare reflects that religion ruins lives, creating in the adherent, with disastrous consequences, the childlike belief that with love alone one can change oneself and others. In pondering the complexities of love which her experience with Mark uncovers for Clare -- the joy of loving and its sometimes painful outcome -- Clare acknowledges a sensuality in her nature that she is honest and courageous enough to face at last.

Despite her brief rebellion against the renunciation required of her -- she very "nearly went to the pictures"! (216) -- Clare seeks refuge in the faith which has been characterized, since her departure from the convent, by "a kind of spiritual numbness" (37). At the church Clare is asked to act as witness to the marriage of a young couple whose courtship the reader witnesses through their weekly visits to the cinema. For the young couple, Bridget and Len, the hurried mid-week wedding witnessed by strangers is the only solution to their need to consummate their love according to the Catholic code of morality. Bridget is no longer a practising Catholic, but the vestiges of her inherited faith dictate that she must marry Len before they consummate their love, "although if ever two people were entitled to belong to each other before they were married, she and Len were those people" (162). The theological arguments underpinning the Catholic prohibition of intercourse before marriage have long been forgotten by Bridget, if indeed she had ever learned them. She had merely felt that "it wouldn't be right, that their last chance was to hold on until they were married, so that however mean and poor it was, their marriage would at least have that to make it special" (162-3). All that remains of Bridget's faith are the rules of sexual conduct, a lingering sense that virginity in the bridal bed is a special gift offered to one's spouse and a working class appreciation for what is "proper."
Clare is disillusioned and disturbed by the "appalling insecurity" of Bridget's and Len's situation. They had planned their rushed marriage because Bridget had been brutally attacked as she walked home alone late at night from a visit to the cinema with Len, and both are afraid for her future safety. However, despite her disillusion, Clare does not appear to question at this point the Catholic moral law that has made this hurried ceremony the only solution to the young couple's predicament. Clare's reaction to the "curt and joyless service" (215) shows that although she still sees human relationships in terms of the roles prescribed by the Church, she recognizes that the "sordid little ceremony" at which she has acted as witness is a sad formality which the young bride and groom feel obliged to undergo in the interests of being "properly married" (223). Clare responds to the young couple with the kindness she had sworn, hours before, never to practice again. Clearly, Clare's healing has begun. As she reflects that she is "glad that she hadn't gone to the cinema" rather than to church, it is clear that her experience with Mark has led her back to, rather than away from, the institutional Church. Orthodoxy, with its externally imposed rules of behaviour remains firmly in place.

While Lodge does not challenge the validity of Church moral law in *The Picturegoers*, he does occasionally confront the misogyny and double standard frequently displayed by Catholics who pride themselves on their orthodoxy. In the character of the ex-seminarian, Damien O'Brien, who is, as Bernard Bergonzi has quipped, "permeated with pharisaical piety" (*David Lodge* 31), Lodge unleashes a black comic irony designed to distance himself from such practitioners of the faith, and to show, as he does so well in subsequent fiction, the way in which Christian virtue can become vice when it is exercised without charity. Like Beatrice, in Anne Redmon's *Music and Silence*, Damien mistakes his innate prudery for the virtue of purity. Beatrice's determination to discover her "fault" leads to her eventual recognition of her "locked and bolted" virtue. Damien, however, remains blind to his shortcomings. Damien is prepared to excuse Mark's predatory sexual designs upon Clare because "immorality in a man was, regrettably, normal" (157), but "immorality, or even immodesty in a woman, was far more
disturbing. It was as if a woman who thus lowered herself (to the level of a man?!) disowned her right to be considered a person, a soul; as if it would be no sin to take advantage of her lust because one could not possibly soil her any further" (157). Damien's reasoning infers that sexual sin leaves a man with his humanity intact, since it is involuntary. A woman who sins sexually, however, becomes less than human, since her sin is a result of her innate lustfulness. Furthermore, cleverly concealed within this piece of outright misogyny is the well-used excuse for male lapses from morality: she asked for it.

As Damien's anger and jealousy at having seen Clare in Mark's embrace increases, he reaches down the great chain of being to find an adequate description of her. She is not only sub-human, she is bestial. In succumbing to Mark's embraces, Clare evokes Damien's "final condemnation... She had soiled herself to the point of revulsion by submitting to [Mark's] pawing in the public street -- shameless as the casual coupling of two dogs. . . . [Damien] looked back contemptuously at his dream of an ideal Christian marriage with this . . . renegade nun on heat" (158-159).

Clare's sudden fall from the pedestal of sainthood, from Damien's point of view, to the level of an animal, is reminiscent of the writings of Albert the Great, the Church Father who warns his readers in his Quaestiones super de animalibus (XV q. 11) to "be on...guard with every woman, as if she were a poisonous snake." Albert goes on to say that "delicate wooers seduce women with careful touches. The more these women seem to reject them, the more they really long for them and resolve to consent. But in order to appear chaste, they act as if they disapprove of such things" (qtd. in Ranke-Heinemann 179). Albert's philosophy catches women in a double bind in that their innate lustfulness means that their seeming modesty must be feigned. They either encourage male lust openly or encourage it while seeming to disapprove. Either way they are culpable. In fact, in seeming to be chaste while actually welcoming the "careful touches" of their seducers, women are guilty of both sexual sin and of dishonesty. This view, that licentiousness is uncontrollable in men, while women are slyly
lecherous by choice, clearly has a long history and continues to thrive in the moral philosophies of hypocrites such as Damien O'Brien.

Damien is unable to see Clare apart from the role he has assigned her in his own story, that of the virgin bride and, subsequently, the chaste and obedient mother of his Catholic children. He cannot allow himself to visualize her as a willing participant in a joyous coupling of husband and wife since feminine enjoyment of sexuality is equated, in his mind, with whoredom and lechery. Thus, he is unable to interpret her behaviour except in terms of his own warped and repressed sexuality. As he fantasizes about the wedding night he hopes to share with Clare once he has magnanimously forgiven her for her infatuation with the "loose-liver," Mark, he imagines saying to her: "Clare, most married people spend the night of their wedding indulging in the pleasures of the flesh, thoughtless of God. I suggest my dear, that being two people specially dedicated to God, we spend this night instead in watching and prayer" (90). In his vision of himself as the quintessential Catholic, only a woman who perfectly emulates the qualities of purity, obedience and holiness that have traditionally characterized the Blessed Virgin could be considered a suitable wife. Thus, when he supplies the wished-for response to his Jansenist piety in the words, "Damien, you are so strong. And I am so weak" (90), it is clear that the Clare whom the narrator presents to the reader is a stranger to Damien. His subsequent vitriolic rejection of Clare because she fails to live up to the ideal of womanhood that Mary represents is understandable, because, as Maurice Hamington points out, it becomes easy "for those caught up in religious zeal (such as Damien O'Brien) to find fault with ordinary women (such as Clare Mallory). Mary's purity was thus used as a weapon against women because it contrasted with the characterization of ordinary women, who were seen as sexually insatiable and easily corrupted" (17).

Damien is not, however, the only one of Clare's admirers to view her in terms of his own fantasies. Although he has abandoned his Catholic faith, Mark sees Clare in the same stereotypical terms used to describe the virgin mother of Christ. He finds Clare's innocence and
piety attractive, but it is the combination, in Clare, of the childlike innocence which is equated with Mary, and the voluptuousness of her body, evocative of Mary's fallen forebear, Eve, that titillates and challenges him. He is attracted by the union in her of goodness and sexual potential. Initially unaware of the duality of his attitude toward Clare, however, Mark lays siege to Clare's body, while at the same time, he derives from her, vicariously, a sense of his own lost innocence. He relives "all the breathless excitement and sense of discovery that accompanied adolescent love, without its pain and misunderstandings. He delight[s] in the frugality of her kisses, look[s] forward like a young kid to the one, chaste goodnight embrace" (38), and it is not until his own latent spirituality begins to emerge that Mark grows increasingly troubled by his distorted, stereotypical view of Clare. As Clare perceptively points out when Mark reveals his plans to join the Dominicans, "it must've been two other people that have been kissing on our front porch for the last nine months. It obviously wasn't you and me" (199). Each had viewed the other in terms of a stereotype. Mark has seen Clare as a beautiful virgin ripely awaiting her awakening, "a treasure" for which "only he had the map" (25), and Clare had recognized in the "cynical, idle, sophisticated Mark" (147) a lost soul upon whom she can exercise her missionary zeal, thereby perhaps regaining her own religious fervour.

As the novel begins, Clare is in the process of discovering the self she will become, while, at the same time, embarking upon her first relationship with a man. Naturally, as she commences the process of becoming, she resents Mark's attempts to restrain her intellectual growth. For Mark, a large part of Clare's attraction for him is the innocence that he seems to confuse with ignorance. Mark attributes his cynicism, worldliness, and loss of faith to his education and, consequently, he equates the opposite attributes of innocence and inexperience in Clare with her lack of higher education. Furthermore, despite his protestation that he has left the faith of his childhood behind, in his desire to preserve Clare's "innocent intensity" (54), which at times seems to border upon dimness, Mark is articulating the Catholic suspicion that knowledge threatens innocence and that ignorance is somehow equated with purity.
In his essay, "Memories of a Catholic Childhood," Lodge dates the beginning of his own questioning of "the Catholic 'ghetto' culture that [he] encountered in the parish and at school, especially its hostility towards the arts," when his wide reading broadened his "intellectual horizons" (Write On 30). While Mark unconsciously echoes the prejudice that knowledge somehow spoils innocence and finds Clare's lack of intellectual development attractive, her awareness of her own ignorance creates in Clare a sense of inferiority which she resents. She tells Mark, "You must educate me... I'm not absolutely stupid, you know; it's just that you're not encouraged to read very widely in a convent" (24). In these words, Clare unconsciously acknowledges the tendency with which institutional Catholicism has been associated by its liberal critics to see a liberal education as a threat to the perceived womanly virtues of obedience and passivity, and, as Arnold Sparr puts it, to view intellectualism as incompatible with belief (10). However, although Clare responds to Mark's protestation that he does not want her educated with the testy rejoinder "but I want me educated" (24), Mark's rather patronising treatment of her is at other times justified by Clare's tendency to assume the role of ingénue that Mark hands to her, even as she protests. For example, after watching a film with Mark, Clare fears that she has "betrayed a lack of appreciation" (141) for the film by not remaining in her seat for a suitable length of time after its finish. Later, during a discussion of the film, she "glow[s] with pleasure at having said the right thing" (144).

Neither Damien nor Mark realizes that the template into which they have forced the object of their interest is an unrealistic and romantic vision which must inevitably turn into a less attractive stereotype as Clare ages. The wife that Clare will become, if Damien has his way, might be expected to resemble Beryl Muspratt, of Evelyn Waugh's novel, Brideshead Revisited, a woman whose obsession with the letter of Catholic moral law renders her impervious to its spirit. Once Mark has made his sexual conquest of Clare, and, presumably, moved on, Clare will more and more resemble her mother, who is a "Clare" figure from the previous generation, now past her prime. Only her "fine head of hair" (86) remains of her past attractions, a vestige
of the beauty she once had.

Lodge's portrayal of Clare's mother, Mrs. Mallory, is both penetrating and compassionate in that he provides insight into the mind of a Catholic wife and mother, who, at middle-age and in mid-century, embodies many of the characteristics which are viewed as stereotypical of Catholic women, while he also recognizes the strength of the faith which sustains such women. Mrs. Mallory is a cradle-Catholic, an Irish woman whose husband had converted to the faith upon their marriage. She is seen predominantly from the points of view of two outsiders: her husband who is a convert, and Mark, who has left the Church. From these perspectives -- Mark's rather romantic view, and Bob's long-suffering fondness -- the picture of a Catholic matriarch emerges.

Physically, Clare's mother, Bett, is what Clare, as a Catholic wife, is likely to become. She attributes her husband's habit of "staring after young girls" (14) to her having gained a great deal of weight as the result of having borne eight children. Mark thinks of her, rather sentimentally, as "a monument to childbearing," not recognizing that Clare's ample curves will, after the births of her own children, doubtless become as "undramatic" as the "slopes" (66) of her mother's body. As the narrative begins, Bett detects a lump in her left breast, a symbolic reference to the loss of perfection which age and childbirth bring to ordinary women in contrast to their role model, the Blessed Virgin. On discovering the lump in her breast during a bout of lovemaking stimulated either by the drink they had just had, or Bob's lingering memory of the buxom Amber Lush of the cinema screen, Bob is momentarily deterred. In the cinema, Mr. Mallory had wondered, after viewing Amber Lush's "magnificent breasts," magnified to even greater proportions upon the screen, how he could be expected to go home and make love to the sagging body of his aging wife (66). Now he faces making love not only to an aging body but also to one that is possibly diseased. However, at the moment of truth, affection and something close to pity provide the wherewithal for him to continue his lovemaking.

Mr. Mallory's response to his wife's physical imperfection and possible disease is the first of several instances in Lodge's fiction in which he implies that compassion has a part to play in
his moral vision with regard to human sexuality. As been pointed out above, this view has drawn criticism from among the ranks of more orthodox Catholics, notably his fellow English novelist, Piers Paul Read, who argues that it is a symptom of the modern love affair with moral relativism. However, the idea that sexual expression is a logical corollary to compassion is clearly an important aspect of Lodge’s personal theology. It is a concept exemplified in Lodge’s subsequent Catholic novels, Paradise News, and Therapy, as well as in the relationship between Bob and Bett Mallory of Picturegoers, and it warrants further discussion later in this chapter.

Just as the Virgin Mary is the role model which real women are unable to emulate, so the film star, Amber Lush, represents the secular and physical ideal for the woman of the 1950s, with whom ordinary women cannot hope to compete. Initially, there seems to be little resemblance between the religious and secular models of ideal womanhood since one is modest and asexual and the other blatantly sexual. However, closer examination reveals that both maintain their potency as symbols by evading the physical effects of childbearing -- Mary by her miraculous conception through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and Amber Lush by avoiding childbearing altogether. In fact, Amber’s body, with its exaggerated curves, is perhaps erotic only from the distance of the cinema screen since, according to Mark, her exaggerated dimensions "might seriously incommode the performance of the sexual act" (69).

As well as having given up her physical beauty in the interests of the faith by bringing eight Catholic souls into the world, Mrs. Mallory’s saintliness is enhanced by her capacity for self-sacrifice. This facet of her nature is evident in the events of Sunday morning seen through the eyes of her husband, Bob. In order to have breakfast ready for her family on their return from mass, Mrs. Mallory gets up early to go alone to early mass so that she will have time to prepare the meal before they return home. Such self-sacrifice is characteristic of Mrs. Mallory, yet her self-denial is not without drawbacks for her family. While not as self-righteous as Tess, the devoted wife and mother of Paradise News who has a tendency to use her own virtue as "a stick with which to beat the rest of the world" (38), Bett Mallory is "snappy and impatient" (112) when
she comes back from church, presumably from hunger and lack of sleep, and she "like[s] to hint obliquely that no one's pleasure or comfort [is] obtainable without some sacrifice on her part" (113). Equating self-denial with holiness, Bett, like Tess, in Paradise News, actively seeks out opportunities in which she can flaunt her capacity for unselfishness, much to her family's discomfort. The reader is reminded, again, of Anne Redmon's heroine, Beatrice, in Music and Silence, who, as the Pazzi family "saint," had not only dutifully denied her own desires in the interests of her demanding family, but "had done it cheerfully to profit her soul" (39).

Although, in this first novel, Lodge tends to romanticize rather than to challenge the preconceived roles which his female characters fill, Clare's younger sister, Patricia, represents the kind of young woman who might later rebel against the pre-cast roles expected of her within the Catholic fold. As a teenager "swotting" for examinations, she is already resentful of the double standard which allows her brothers a relatively easy life at home, whereas her parents "expected her to do everything, to study and help with the housework" (31). Perceptively, she notices that only Mark, the non-Catholic, understands how she feels about this injustice. In her misery, she wonders how, "if it wasn't for Mark" she would "keep her sanity and self-respect under the absurdly puritanical discipline imposed on her by her mother" (33). Clearly, Patricia is an excellent candidate for later experimentation and rebellion. Her mutinous "wasting [of] time and money" on the cinema "when she should have been studying" (131) causes Patricia to ask herself why she feels "so much more a person when she [is] not being virtuous" (131). Such thoughts suggest that Patricia is ready to rebel and to create herself outside the norms of expected behaviour. She knows intuitively that it is one's vices as well as one's virtues that create one's unique personhood. Such notions are suggestive of the personal theology of Graham Greene and perhaps some of the novels that Mark has been lending Patricia -- he seems to have no reluctance in contributing to the education of Clare's younger sister, upon whom he has no sexual designs -- are Greene's. It seems likely that Patricia's intelligence, coupled with her longing for the "freedom to think and act for herself, freedom to let life happen
to her, instead of having to shape it to her parent's expectations" (132), will lead her to jettison, eventually, her rather comic belief that "a Catholic couldn't get practical experience. It had to be books" (97). Perhaps Lodge sees Patricia as a potential female variant of his younger self, whose education "extended [his] intellectual horizons" and made him "critical of the Catholic 'ghetto' culture" in which he has been brought up (Write On 31).

In The British Museum Is Falling Down, Lodge gives satirical treatment to the longing of his characters for the freedom to act according to individual conscience rather than in accordance with Church law. The novel is laced with a gentle irony which bears testimony to Lodge's bittersweet relationship with the Catholic Church. It tells the story of a young Catholic couple, significantly named Adam and Barbara Appleby, who struggle to keep the rules for sexual behaviour laid down by the Church, but without producing further children they cannot presently afford. Adam is a graduate student with a scholarship, working on his doctoral dissertation and living with his wife and three very young children in a tiny London flat. Like Clare, Adam resents the tedious and complicated moral code to which, as Catholics, they are bound. He envies the freedom of non-Catholics in sexual matters as he and his wife await anxiously the arrival of the sign that will show that their use of "a simple mathematical formula for calculating the safe period" (9) has been successful. "How different it must be," Adam thinks, the life of an ordinary, non-Catholic parent, free to decide -- actually to decide, in calm confidence -- whether to have or not to have a child. How different from his own married state, which [he] symbolized as a small, over-populated, low-lying island ringed by a crumbling dyke which he and his wife struggled hopelessly to repair as they kept anxious watch on the surging sea of fertility that surrounded them. (8)

However, neither Clare, in the 1950s, nor Adam and Barbara, in the mid 1960s, seriously consider rejecting the authority of the Church. Like Lodge and his wife when they married in 1959, both Clare and the Applebys see Catholic moral law and, in the Applebys' case, the "Catholic prohibition on artificial contraception" in particular, as "as fixed and immutable a component of Catholic teaching as any article of the Creed" (Afterword 165).

While the thought of the possible arrival of another mouth to feed is a mental distraction
for Adam -- and the novel focuses upon the effect upon Adam of the Church's ban on "unnatural" forms of birth control -- it is Barbara who must bear the physical consequences of their adherence to the rhythm method. Lodge wrote the following comic description of the Applebys' various attempts to confound their fertility during the years just before the convening of the Second Vatican Council, when hopes where high among the liberal clergy and laity that the rigid rules of sexual conduct, particularly with regard to contraception, would at last be relaxed:

They had embarked on marriage with vague notions about the Safe Period and a hopeful trust in Providence that Adam now found difficult to credit. Clare [the Appleby's first child] had been born nine months after the wedding. Barbara had then consulted a Catholic doctor who gave her a simple mathematical formula for calculating the safe period -- so simple that Dominic was born one year after Clare. Shortly afterwards Adam was released from the army, and returned to London to do research. Someone gave Barbara a booklet explaining how she could determine the time of her ovulation by recording her temperature each morning. (9)

It is this indignity which she is suffering as the novel begins. Barbara "lay on her stomach, sucking a thermometer. A small peak in the bedclothes further down indicated the presence of a second thermometer. Unable to decide on the relative accuracy of the oral and rectal methods of taking her temperature, Barbara had decided to employ both" (10). Barbara had followed this procedure, daily, until she became pregnant again with her third child in four years. Now, with Barbara's period overdue, the anxiety has begun again. She and Adam are so preoccupied with the minutiae of graph-plotting and mathematical calculation in their marital relations that there is neither time nor energy left for spirituality.

In a sense, David Lodge's 1980 novel, How Far Can You Go? is a sequel to The British Museum Is Falling Down both in terms of its theme -- it deals with the sexual aspects of its characters' lives -- and in its concern with the quotidian lives of ordinary Catholics. As in his satirical novel The British Museum Is Falling Down, Lodge again "transposes" the kind of spiritual and moral drama that [he] had encountered in Graham Greene's and François Mauriac's fiction . . . into a homelier, suburban key" (Write On 64), and "domesticate[s] their
themes to the humdrum suburban-parochial milieu that [he knows] best" (Write On 31).

However, in *How Far Can You Go?* Lodge's comic tone is noticeably subdued.

The afterword to *The British Museum Is Falling Down* provides a clue to the reason for the more sober tone of *How Far Can You Go?* Here, Lodge explains that *The British Museum Is Falling Down* had been published during the period between the end of the Second Vatican Council and the publication of Pope Paul II's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, in which he reiterated the ban on artificial birth control. Thus, *How Far Can You Go?*, which was published in 1980, by which time it had become clear that Catholic moral teaching on sexual matters such as birth control where not going to be relaxed, is a far more serious novel, (although it manages a brave "smile" once in a while). It reflects "the much more fundamental debate [on matters of authority and sexuality] which continues to this day" (Afterword to *The British Museum Is Falling Down* 164). The rules that many Catholics thought would become the sources of the comic anecdotes of an older generation of Catholics were made as securely binding as ever. At this time, a debate of sorts in fiction erupted in which liberal Catholic novelists, such as David Lodge, began to portray in their novels the struggle toward more progressive interpretations of the faith, while writers such as Piers Paul Read, whose work is discussed in a later chapter, argued in fiction for the orthodox view represented by the Pope's encyclical, underpinning their fiction with their conviction of the validity of conservative interpretations of the faith and the necessity for obedience to Church moral law.

*How Far Can You go?* chronicles the developments in faith and practice of a group of young Catholics over two decades against a backdrop of what seemed to liberal Catholics to be the agonizingly slow evolution of the institutional Church. As the novelist A.N. Wilson points out in his collection of essays, *Penfriends from Porlock*, the novel reads like a documentary rather than a story as it "simply follows the fortunes of ten Roman Catholics from young adulthood to middle-age, and chronicles the way in which the Second Vatican Council changed their attitudes to faith and to sex" (94). Although Wilson finds *How Far Can You Go?*
"highly readable," he admits to having been "struck" by what he sees as its "moral
ambivalence." In support of this view, he writes:

Two Roman Catholics recommended me to read it when it first came out. One was a
trendy priest who thought that it exposed the horrors which his co-religionists had
suffered until the Liberal Revolution: 'You know, people really did believe those things,'
he said to me, with reference to the Real Presence of Christ in the Mass, the possibility
of some actions being sinful, the wickedness of contraception, the dangers of hell.
Another papist reader of the book, however, equally enthusiastic, while regretting
moments of sexual explicitness, praised the merciless expose of how things have gone
completely to the dogs: here are heart-rending moments of the sheer embarrassment of
'house-masses', guitars, handshakes, liberation theology and intellectual muddle. (94)

Wilson himself confesses to having thought that the novel "must have been written from a
conservative point of view" (94).

My own reading of the novel does not suggest this view, perhaps because I have the
advantage of retrospect, having read Lodge's subsequent novels, and can perhaps see more
clearly the overall direction of Lodge's thought. Lodge, in fact, pokes gentle fun at some of the
efforts of his eager new liberal Catholics to fashion for themselves a faith that will have greater
meaning and relevance in their lives and suggests some of the pitfalls that such attempts must
encounter. However, his sympathy at this stage in his career seems to me to be directed
towards each of characters engaged in the struggle, rather than with any or either theological
point of view. In his work, The Dialogic Novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge, Robert A.
Morace contests Wilson's view that How Far Can You Go? is morally ambivalent, arguing
instead that "Lodge undermines the logic of both the old morality and the new" in order to "evoke
a necessary and healthy indecidability" (180). However, while Lodge does provide an "array of
characters who . . . struggle on . . . in search of precisely that static wholeness and closure
which the novel resists in a variety of ways" (180-181), his primary purpose seems to be to
portray those "characters" and to chronicle their "struggle," rather to proffer in his fiction a
personal vision of the Catholic faith, orthodox or liberal. It is the earnestness and honesty with
which his ten Catholics and their partners plot their strategy in the "tiresome game" of How Far
Can You Go? that concerns Lodge. Possible answers to the question posed in the title are
explored, but never definitively answered.

The question that is answered by Lodge in How Far Can You Go? however, and with great certainty, is what enables his characters to break their unquestioning allegiance to the moral authority of the Church. At a gathering in a pub in 1969, Lodge's group of Catholics and their spouses discuss, with wonder bordering upon disbelief, the power they had previously allowed the institutional Church to wield over their sexual lives. Together they locate the source of that power in thorough early conditioning, in the imposition of guilt, and in a fear of hell which made dissent unthinkable, since "the whole system of religious authority and obedience in which they had been brought up, binding the Church together in a pyramid of which the base was the laity and the apex the Pope, depended on the fear of Hell as its ultimate sanction" (118). As Michael, one of Lodge's group of young Catholics, now middle-aged and a liberal, points out, their former obedience "all came down to fear of Hell" (79).

In addition to their fear of hell, as Polly, another member of the group, reflects, English Catholics were by nature resistant to change in that "they took everything so seriously. They tried to keep all the rules really and truly, not just outwardly. Of course that was impossible, it was against human nature, especially where sex was concerned" (39). In these words Polly echoes Lodge's contention, in his afterword to The British Museum Is Falling Down, that the "rage for consistency" had been, perhaps, "especially characteristic of British and American Catholicism, as opposed to the European variety, because it was precisely the strength of the system that it was total, comprehensive, and uncompromising, and it seemed to those brought up in the system [in Britain and America, at least] that to question one part of it was to question all of it, and that to pick and choose among its moral imperatives, flouting those which were inconveniently difficult, was simply hypocritical. (165)

However, when "at some point in the nineteen sixties, Hell disappeared" (113), its loss brought "great relief, though it brought new problems" (113).

Lodge ascribes the "new-found moral independence of the laity" (118), which had been characterized by the refusal by many to adhere to the teaching of the Church regarding artificial
birth control, to the disappearance of the fear of hell. Lodge's narrator claims that "contraception was the issue on which many lay Catholics first attained moral autonomy, rid themselves of superstition, and ceased to regard their religion as, in the moral sphere, an encyclopaedic rule-book in which a clear answer was to be found to every possible question of conduct" (How Far Can You Go? 118), especially as a liberal interpretation of Humanae Vitae allowed for the view that "while contraception was, as the Pope affirmed, objectively wrong, there might be subjective circumstances that made it so venial a sin as scarcely to be worth worrying about, and certainly not a reason for ceasing to go to mass and Holy Communion" (119). Such a shift from obedience to Church authority on matters of sexual conduct to greater moral independence might appear, on the face of it, to affect both male and female Catholics equally. However, the conscious acceptance of the notion that the sexual act does not necessarily become a grave sin when separated from the act of procreation renders redundant the necessity to blame women for male sexual transgressions. Women, therefore, are doubly freed -- from the stigma of grave sin and from the assumption that they have been, deliberately, "occasions of sin" for their male partners.

In How Far Can You Go? Lodge does not focus specifically upon changes in attitude toward women during the two decades before and after the convening of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, there is little in the novel to suggest that he considers the playing field anything but level for both sets of players in the moral "game [of] Salvation" (6). There are, however, two scenes within the novel in which Lodge obliquely acknowledges a Catholic propensity for misogyny -- one, an incident in which a priest is the culprit, and the other an occurrence in which an erring husband and father may be held guilty of misogyny.

In an incident near the beginning of the novel, when all of Lodge's representative Catholics are still at university, a member of the group of students, Angela, takes part in a skit which involves acting out the body language of a seductress by "point[ing] a stockinged leg, daringly exposed to the very suspender button, at the ceiling and wiggl[ing] her toes in a droll
signal of alarm or ecstasy" (27). This unexpected display of flesh causes her young pastor, Father Brierley, to have "impure thoughts" and he tells his own confessor that he "can't seem to get the image of the girl's leg out of [his] mind" (29). His priest responds with a tirade against Polly, whom he sees as responsible for Father Brierley's discomfort since, by behaving alluringly, she has been for him "an occasion of sin" (29). He pronounces Father Brierley innocent and denounces Polly as one of "these young hussies [who] need their bottoms smacked" (29). In being encouraged to blame Polly, however, Father Brierley is deprived of the opportunity to learn from his experience something of the nature of his own sexuality. It is, however, far more comfortable and convenient to "blame the woman" rather than to acknowledge his own urges and desires.

Just as women in general have traditionally been considered snares by which men can be beguiled into sin, "fallen women" have been thought fair game for men looking for sexual adventure. Such women have already blotted their moral copybooks, the reasoning goes, so they lose nothing by surrendering their honour a second time. Dennis's young secretary, Lynn, falls into this category since the existence of her illegitimate son is living proof of her fall from grace, the fact that "some bloke put her in the family way, and then scarpered" (202). Despite "the fading away of the traditional Catholic metaphysic" (239) which had included the sinfulness of sexuality enjoyed for its own sake, Dennis assumes, because of the existence of her child, that Lynn regularly indulges in the pleasures of sex outside the bounds of holy matrimony, and that she will be quite willing to do so with him.

In his discontent with his marriage and family life, Dennis sees in Lynn's situation the chance to enjoy the sexual activity that his wife's lack of interest has denied him. His assumption that she is "on the pill" betrays his view of Lynn, as does his insistence on congratulating her on her performance each time they make love. Lynn tries to correct Dennis's assumptions by pointing out that she has not "got a fella" and "doesn't go in for one night stands" (206). Usually self-effacing, Lynn clings to Dennis "with a fierce intensity" during love-
making, seeming to "be staking a claim on his future" (224), yet her ironic smile in response to Dennis's praise of her sexual performance shows that she knows only too well that her willingness to have sex is the main reason for his interest in her. Lodge's compassionate portrayal of this lonely young woman whose transition from girlhood to womanhood has been accelerated by her unwanted pregnancy and motherhood reveals an awareness of the double standard which labels as whores women who break accepted rules of sexual conduct and allows their male partners to retain their reputations intact. The married man who had seduced Lynn had "scarpered," leaving Lynn to raise her child alone since she has left home rather than disgrace her family (206). Experience has taught her both that men require sex in exchange for their company and that she must herself take responsibility to protect herself from further pregnancies.

In a moment of insight, Dennis's wife, Angela, realises that Lynn is not a stereotypical "hussy," bent on seducing other people's husbands. She believes Lynn to be in love, not with Dennis, but with "her idealized picture of his family life" (225). In becoming his mistress, Lynn has not "thrown herself at Dennis" (224) in sexual abandon. She has simply done what she believes to be necessary in obtaining a surrogate father for her small son. The sort of misogyny that assumes women like Lynn to be loose women rather than unfortunate victims is, admittedly, not limited to adherents of the Catholic faith. However, the tendency to blame the female partner in cases of unlawful sexual conduct has a long tradition in the Catholic Church which colours the thinking of men such as Dennis despite the fact that the reason for it -- the need to pass on responsibility for male lapses in continence -- has almost disappeared. By the time Dennis embarks on his affair with Lynn, sexual pleasure is no longer considered sinful by liberal Catholics such as the group to which he and his wife belong, yet Dennis does not adjust his prejudice accordingly with regard to Lynn. He treats her as an unpaid prostitute in order to satisfy his sexual appetite. Eventually, "exhausted from nightly sex" and "depressed by the meanness of [Lynn's flat]" (226), Dennis returns, suitably penitent, to his wife and family.
The frank portrayal of Catholic family life is another means by which Lodge de-romanticizes the traditional assumption that Catholic motherhood and wifehood are always serene and glorious callings. In the character of Dennis's wife, Angela, Lodge questions the traditional picture of the "big, warm, happy Catholic family" (64). As a young girl, Angela had "sentimentalized" and "idealized" the "noisy bustle and religious zeal" that filled her home. When she returns home from university, however, Angela realizes that "her mother's part in all this had been a lifetime of drudgery, her father's a lifetime of worry. . . . Their sexual life was unimaginable . . . because they seemed so exhausted, so drained of tenderness to each other, by the clamorous demands of their offspring" (64). Remembering her mother's tired efforts to cope with washing that accumulated as fast as it could be washed, the ironing, sweeping and hoovering, and the mud and dirt tramped through the house, she had been reluctant to marry Dennis and had hoped that he would "leave [her] in peace and find some other girl, someone who really want[ed] to get married" (65).

In fear that she might become like her own tired and overworked mother, after the birth of her fourth child, a little girl with Down's Syndrome, and the death of her daughter Anne in a road accident, Angela had begun taking the birth control pill. Yet, caring for a family which includes a child with special needs takes so much of her energy that her husband accuses her of using her handicapped child Nichole "as an excuse for ignoring his needs" (223). When he turns to his secretary, Lynn, for the fulfilment of sexual needs which Angela is unwilling to meet, she recalls the reluctance to marry which she had suppressed twenty years before. "I tried to get out of it," she tells her friend, Miriam, "but he wore me down" (223). Clearly, Angela had tried to accommodate herself to the prescribed role of wife and mother for which she knew herself to be ill-equipped. Sadly, in the pre-Vatican II climate of prescribed roles, she had not had the strength to resist the pressure to marry and to insist instead upon a lifestyle suited to her character and needs. The twenty years of her marriage has seen the "the fading away of the traditional Catholic metaphysic -- that marvellously complex and ingenious synthesis of theology
and cosmology and casuistry, which situated individual souls on a kind of spiritual Snakes and Ladders board" (239), and which had straight-jacketed the faithful in institutionally approved social roles such as the one which Angela had reluctantly assumed and from which it had been difficult to break free.

In his subsequent Catholic novel, Paradise News, which was published in 1991, Lodge's focus shifts from the very Catholic controversy over birth control to eschatological issues and a more overt concern with self-fulfilment in this world. As Bernard Bergonzi put it, "hell quietly disappeared for the liberal Catholics in How Far Can You Go?, and [in Paradise News] it seems that heaven may have gone the same way" (David Lodge 41). In this novel, Lodge provides a vivid portrayal of an ex-priest whose answer to the question of how far one can go in following one's own conscience is, as Bernard Bergonzi quips, "further still" (40). Lodge's hero, Bernard Walsh, "has abandoned not only the priesthood but Catholic belief itself" (40). Ironically, having lost his faith, Bernard has become a theologian, teaching at one of a group of theological colleges where one "could study anything that could be brought under the umbrella of religion" as if it were a kind of "religious supermarket" (Paradise News 34-35). In How Far Can You Go? Lodge's characters remain within what Lodge has termed the Catholic "ghetto," although their vision has passed beyond its bounds as they struggle to assume moral autonomy. In Paradise News, however, Bernard's story and redemption from despair take place outside the Catholic enclave and within the secular world. Furthermore, while moving away from the essentially orthodox atmosphere of his first two Catholic novels and the liberal Catholic milieu inhabited by the protagonists of How Far Can You Go? Lodge returns, in Paradise News, to the formal and thematic device he had used in The Picturegoers, in which he had employed the extended metaphor of the Saturday night visit to the cinema as the modern and secular substitute for church-going. In Paradise News, Lodge explores the package tour holiday as a modern form of pilgrimage as a means of exploring the modern propensity to substitute secular rites for religious ones. By this means Lodge suggests that the spiritual sense has not been completely lost in
the secularisation of society, but has been invested in more immediate and temporal soteriologies. In her 1992 novel, *Bodily Harm*, Rachel Billington also suggests that the spiritual sense is frequently subsumed into more secular rituals. She describes at length her heroine’s visit to a Turkish bath where she is steamed, bathed, pummelled, and scrubbed until she emerges onto the “crowded and dirty pavements with a sense of invincible goodness” (6). The metaphor is enhanced by the fact that the baths are housed in a building “designed in the thirties with lavish use of marble, pillars, gold paint, panelled wood, art-deco lighting, the lot” (3), which is reminiscent of a cathedral.

In *Paradise News*, as in his previous Catholic novels, Lodge’s narrative follows the fortunes of a central male protagonist. Lodge’s “hero,” Bernard, and his elderly, irascible father, Jack, set out for Hawaii to visit Jack’s estranged sister who is terminally ill and wishes to heal her broken relationship with her brother before she dies. Father and son join a motley group of tourists on a package tour because the regular fare for such a trip would be prohibitively expensive. Lodge’s chief focus in this darkly comic novel is the journey which Bernard undertakes with his father, and the way in which it leads to a new, more hopeful vision of the meaning of Bernard’s life and to a less pessimistic interpretation of his “failure” as a priest. However, from among the supporting characters, Lodge provides three possible feminine responses to the requirements of the Catholic faith vis-à-vis the pressures of modern life in the characters of Bernard’s dying Aunt, Ursula, his sister Tessa, and his lover, Yolande. Each of these women represents a recognizable stereotype along the spectrum of female roles that divide the saint and the sinner according to rigid and polarized notions of good and evil. Of the three, only Yolande, the non-Catholic, has managed to throw off the restrictive yoke of preconceived notions of feminine behaviour.

The supporting cast of characters in *Paradise News* falls loosely into two groups: the holiday-makers, who are bent upon having a good time, and the Walsh family, who seem determined, in the name of the Catholic faith, to abjure pleasure in any of its forms. The notion
that the Catholic life well lived is primarily one of service rather than of happiness is a shared
classic characteristic of these members of two generations of the Walsh family. An insistence on
keeping intact at all costs the predetermined stereotypical roles prescribed for each of them,
whether or not they are successful in fulfilling the expectations such roles place upon them,
precludes the possibility of joy in their lives. Thus, Bernard is viewed merely as a failed priest.
Aunt Ursula -- for whom the family had reserved the role of spinster, selflessly dedicated to the
care of her elderly parents -- is dismissed as a hedonist living her life entirely at odds with the
spirit of self-denial and austerity which the Walshes take to be the essence of Catholicism. To
the Walshes, misery is the greatest of virtues. Ursula's brother Sean, whom her parents had
"idolized" had been elevated to sainthood after his death during the war, enjoying in death a
reputation he had not earned during his short life.

In addition to assuming the burden of ill-fitting imposed roles, the Walsh family members
have never viewed each other in isolation, each according to his or her individual characteristics.
Instead, they are viewed, as stereotypes invariably are, in juxtaposition to one another. In this
way, Sean's saintliness has been enhanced by the fall of his sister, just as Bernard's failure
seems greater when compared to the devotion to duty by which his sister Tess has earned the
title of family martyr. The central irony of the novel, however, is that those family members who
are fundamentally "good," such as Ursula and her nephew Bernard, are vilified for their failure to
perform in roles for which they have no aptitude, while their qualities in other spheres are
ignored. Such self-deception has dire consequences: the Saintly Sean had caused serious
harm to his sister Ursula, but is unofficially "canonized" by Bernard's parents, and Bernard's
sister Tess's self-professed martyrdom is partly built on the ruins of Bernard's reputation.
Lodge's portrayal of Tess shows that such constructed fictions of character, based upon
distorted notions of Catholic dogma, can be devastating. In the characters of Bernard's aunt
and his sister Ursula, to cite two examples, Lodge shows how such stereotyping can, at the
least, limit the growth of the individual, and at worst, lead to a ruined life. In the contrasting
figure of Bernard's lover and secular "saviour," Yolande, however, Lodge provides a portrait of a life free from the restrictive bonds of stereotyping and externally imposed roles.

In Ursula, Lodge proceeds to deconstruct one such simplistic categorization by revealing the reality of Ursula's sad life against a backdrop of the sanctimonious condemnation of her by her brother, Jack. Her marriage, after the Second World War, to a divorced American ex-soldier made Ursula a "fallen" woman, in the eyes if the Walsh family. Not only had she turned her back on the Catholic faith (to marry a divorcé is to commit the grave sin of adultery, according to Catholic moral law), according to Jack, she had "broke[n] her parents' hearts, that were already broken by Sean's death. Never mind that she was abandoning them in their old age" (45). Jack supports this judgement of her with anecdotes that are intended to illustrate her selfishness and which condemn the opulent American lifestyle Ursula had adopted while her family lived in poverty in post-war Britain. According to Jack, Ursula had gone "like a shot" (45) to America to enjoy "a life of materialistic self-indulgence" (28) in the "Eden" which America then represented to those enduring the crowded conditions and inclement weather of England's industrial Midlands. In recounting Ursula's one visit home after the break up of her marriage, Jack recalls only her shortcomings. She had continually used up all the hot water (302), outraged the frugal Walshes by wearing a different dress every day (47), and flaunted her new prosperity with reports of "the size of their house, the size of their car, the size of the refrigerator and every blessed item of booze and grub there was in it" (46).

Jack's disapproval, however, is founded less in moral indignation at Ursula's uncatholic indulgence in material things than in envy. Rather than rejoicing in his sister's success, he resents it because the prosperity she has enjoyed has failed to come his way. Of her enthusiastic descriptions of her life of plenty in "Noo Jersey," Jack can only ask Bernard bitterly to "imagine how that cheered us up, with the rationing like it was just after the war" (46). In a similar fashion, Jack passes judgement on the kind of young woman Ursula had been. He denounces her as a "bit of a flirt" who had given men "the brush off" as soon as they started
getting serious," but had then "[thrown] herself at that yank" (46). Bernard is soon to learn how appallingly far from the truth Jack's estimation of Ursula's sexual character had been. Having predicted the failure of Ursula's marriage (44), however, Jack now derives a coldly smug sense of satisfaction that his predictions have become a reality. He feels no pity for the sister who is dying alone and far from home, choosing instead to attribute her abandonment by her husband and her terminal disease to some kind of divine judgement for "pleasing herself" (44) rather than selflessly fulfilling her duty to family and faith. Later in the story, however, Jack's unchristian determination to keep in place the fiction of Ursula's bad character is revealed to be an essential part of the construction of his own fictitious innocence.

By the time Ursula calls Bernard to tell him of her illness and her desire to be reunited with her brother, Bernard has not seen his "obscurely disgraced" (25) aunt since she was a young woman in the early 1950s. He had been a child at the time of her visit and had innocently ingested the family view of Ursula as a selfish and worldly woman. From his adult perspective, as the story begins, Bernard learns to admire the brave old girl "who jest[s] in the shadow of death" (26). The Ursula Bernard will come to know well during the last days of her life is a courageous and practical woman. In the telephone call that sets in motion the events that ensue, Ursula introduces herself, with wry humour, as "the black sheep of the family. Or should I say . . . ewe" (24). However, it gradually becomes clear that far from being a "black sheep," Ursula is the innocent "lamb," sacrificed in the interests of keeping the family "legend" (28) intact. The exact nature of the family myth is slowly revealed in the family members' self-serving evaluations of each other and deconstructed in tandem with the deconstruction -- and subsequent reconstruction -- of Bernard's vision of himself.

Ursula's self-deprecating humour and her restraint in defending herself and condemning the unchristian behaviour of her family are the first indications that Jack's denunciation of her is unjust. The perceptive Bernard is not slow to realize that there is a disjunction between the real Ursula and the unrepentant wanton of Walsh family mythology. Bernard's rapidly accumulating
experience suggests that quite a different interpretation might be placed upon Ursula's
dbehaviour. Just as there is a "mismatch between the reality and the archetype" (163) of
paradise that Hawaii is taken to be, there also might be a "mismatch" between the "reality" which
is Ursula, and the fallen woman stereotype (163) with which Bernard's family have obscured her
reality. He begins to remember the food parcels Ursula had sent home, and the incidents during
her one visit home which had been attributed by his parents to Ursula's selfishness but which
might well have been, as in fact Ursula confirms later, the result of cultural differences. Ursula
had become "Americanized" and had not experienced the deprivations and austerities that
characterized life in Britain in the aftermath of the war.

It is not only Bernard, however, who comes to a new understanding of his own nature.
His father, Jack, and his sister, Teresa, also confront the truth about themselves. While the
main climax of the novel is Bernard's discovery that he has qualities of character that make his
failure as a priest pale into insignificance by comparison and that, armed with this knowledge
and with the assurance of Ursula's love for him, he can hope for a better future, his father and
sister also experience personal moments of truth. Ursula's and Jack's reunion leads to a
satisfying resolution to the problem besetting the Walsh family as a whole. During this meeting,
the Walsh family "myth" is blown apart and, in the aftermath, each of the remaining members
confronts the truth that emerges from the rubble. Jack is able to admit that "at the time [of
Sean's abuse of Ursula, which he had witnessed], he was frightened to report Sean to [their]
father and mother, because Sean had got up to some dirty games with him too . . . and he was
afraid it would all come out and all of [the children] would be thrashed within an inch of [their]
lives" (319). Now that the secret is out, Jack is able to apologize for the cowardice of having
chosen to protect himself from their parents' wrath rather than "threatening to tell on Sean" (286)
in an effort to stop the abuse.

Ursula has returned to the faith of her childhood, not merely, as it first appears, to find
comfort as death approaches -- she had made her return many years before cancer invaded her
body -- but in the hope of finding more durable values than the secular world can provide. Ursula's return to the Catholic fold is not without reservations, however. She is an honest enquirer who brings to her rediscovery of the faith the simple logic and plain common sense that her life has taught her. When Bernard parrots the stale cliché, "virtue is its own reward," in response to her question, "why be good, if you're not going to be rewarded for it?" Ursula replies tartly, "the hell with that!" (257). Similarly, when Tess informs her that "the Last Sacrament," is no longer so named, nor is it referred to as "Extreme Unction" but as "the Sacrament of the Sick," Ursula refuses to be side-tracked by what she considers to be mere semantics. She responds, dryly, with the words: "whatever it's called, I think I could use it" (305). Ursula's blunt honesty enables Bernard to discern very rapidly the disjunction between Ursula's reputation and her reality, and in coming to terms with the truth of his aunt's goodness in contrast with the fiction of her "disgrace" maintained by his family, Bernard begins to see himself in a truer light.

Bernard is appalled by Ursula's revelation of her childhood abuse, and the disclosure of her shameful secret to Bernard is rendered unforgettably poignant for the reader by her reversion to childish diction. As if in a trance, Ursula describes Sean's abuse of her. She tells Bernard: "Sean used to make me hold it [sic] and then stuff like catarrh would squirt out of the little hole in the top, over my hand" (283). The description of such an act in the vocabulary of a seven-year-old child serves to transmit to the reader something of the fear, bewilderment and helplessness felt by the child that Ursula had been, and a clear sense of the damage the abuse had inflicted upon her developing character. Her childish diction also serves to emphasize the fact that, as a sexual being, Ursula's had ceased to develop from the time of Sean's abuse of her. As an old woman she is still, sexually, a confused and traumatized child. The childish language in which she tells her story also drives home the appalling fact that Ursula has carried the burden of her secret for most of her life, in her shame not daring to unburden herself to anyone.

In the light of Ursula's revelation, the real reasons for the major choices in her life
become clear. She had married in haste in order to escape from a family which had "canonized" the brother who had abused her and had put up in "an honoured place in the family shrine, a full-length snapshot of a lance-corporal in battledress, standing at ease and laughing at the camera" (45). The marriage that was her escape from the unsupportable pain of living in a home where the memory of her abuser had been given heroic proportions had failed due to Ursula's inability to "let herself go" during love-making. "Kissing wasn't my problem," she tells Bernard, "I always liked kissing and cuddling. It was the other business I couldn't get on with" (283). Bernard's therapist-lover points out that "the physical acts are not necessarily important in child abuse. It's the fear, the shame, that leave the scars" (285). This is certainly the case with Ursula.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that the faith of Ursula's childhood, at least as conceived by the Walsh family, had been indirectly responsible for the addition of a painful sense of shame to Ursula's suffering, when it ought to have provided the means for her healing. In particular, the Jansenist Irish Catholicism of the Walsh family had made sexuality a subject never to be discussed. In the resulting climate of ignorance, sexuality and the sins that attach to it become the focus of the fear of hell. Bernard reflects that his fear of hell and ignorance of sex had paralysed him as a young man, so that he had hoped that the priesthood with its vow of celibacy would "solve all [his] problems at one stroke: sex, education, career, and eternal salvation" (181-182). For Bernard, as for many young Catholics of his generation, to remove the temptations associated with matters of sexuality was to remove the problem of sin altogether. Perhaps, unconsciously, Ursula had absorbed the prevailing assumption that women are the instigators of male sexual sin. At any rate, Ursula had clearly taken on the guilt for a sin for which she could have been in no way responsible and had been too ashamed to mention in the confessional. This guilt had resulted in "years [during which] she was in terror of sudden death, convinced she would go straight to hell" (285). Thus, not only had her family failed Ursula, she had also had to live with the appalling fear that God had also abandoned her.

As the novel begins, Ursula tells Bernard that she has returned to a Catholic faith that
she "hardly recognized" in her later years, having been assured by a progressive priest that she could now take communion in good conscience. However, in re-entering the Catholic fold, Ursula is determined not to be side-tracked from the fundamentals of the faith which seem often to get lost among the pointless peripherals to which dogmatic faiths, such as Catholicism, are susceptible. She is determined, this time, to gain from her faith the solace it promises. Thus, in an act of Christian forgiveness, Ursula initiates a reconciliation between herself and her brother during the last days of her life, despite the fact that it will necessarily involve divulging the shameful secret of her childhood abuse.

Ursula's confession shatters the family myth so completely that Bernard's sister, Tess, is forced to reconsider both her assumptions about her family and her vision of herself. Like her father Jack, Tess has had a vested interest in maintaining the fiction of Ursula's lack of responsibility toward her family and her life of "material self-indulgence in America" (28) since, by contrast, her own life of selfless service appears doubly heroic. Tessa's saintly serenity conceals a seething anger at the unfairness of her lot in life. While she appears to embody the humility and patience of the saint whose name she bears, inwardly she rages against the injustice which allows her brother to live a life which she perceives is devoid of responsibility, while she must undertake not only the care of her large family, but attend to the needs of their elderly father, as well. However, Tess cannot acknowledge her resentment without losing the admiration and respect which derive from her role. Instead, she vents her frustration in a bitter cynicism and a refusal to acknowledge anything but selfishness in the motives of others. She has, in fact, become a caricature of the traditional image of the long-suffering, soft-tongued martyr.

Such distortions, Lodge seems to suggest, occur when traditional Catholic roles, such as that of the self-sacrificing mother, become so idealized that they become impracticable. While Tess's life is irrefutably hard and her efforts seem to be undervalued, it is clear that her determination to cope has made those who might have shared, and therefore lightened, her
burden feel inadequate or unwanted. Tess does not hesitate to sacrifice the needs of her husband, Frank, for example, in the interests of her handicapped son. When Tess's husband is discovered to have begun a relationship with a "little schoolteacher," it is clear that his need for her is not sexual but emotional. Frank's girlfriend is "a lonely heart... just looking for a shoulder to cry on" (290) and, in supplying that shoulder, Frank feels needed. Conversely, Tess has never been able to acknowledge a need for his help or support. When she complains that he has never shown her "a fraction of the compassion [he] had for that girl," he responds by pointing out that Tess had seemed "strong" and without the need of his compassion. (291).

Toward the conclusion of the novel, as the reality of her aunt Ursula's sad life dawns upon Tess, and she acknowledges her father's culpability in not reporting his brother's aberrant behaviour to their parents, Tess is shocked into a reassessment of her life and its meaning. The impact of the shock of her husband's betrayal also leads her to reconsider her priorities and to recognize that she has used her handicapped son as a "ball and chain" (312), neglecting her husband's needs in her obsession with the child. Bernard's "epiphany" at the end of the novel, is echoed by one of her own as she acknowledges her unfairness toward her brother and her habit of putting only the worst complexion upon the motives of others. She realizes that her construction of herself as the family martyr has been effected at the expense of others, and is therefore a parody of the notion of Christian love, which, while it "suffers long," ought also to be "kind" (1 Cor. 13: 4).

In very different ways, the effects of the Walsh family's interpretation of the Catholic faith have stunted the lives of both Tess and her aunt. As Ursula's sad account of her sexual history makes clear, the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, and its aftermath of fear, shame, and silence, which is the result of a deep-seated prudery, have effectively arrested the development of the sexual component of her character, rendering her unable to sustain or enjoy an adult sexual relationship. In Tess, an exaggerated response to the call to selfless service which the Catholic Church propounds as the quintessence of holiness has led to an emotional poverty
manifest in her reluctance to acknowledge the needs and aspirations of others. While not entirely absent from their marriage, sex for Tess and Frank is "something silent and physical, done in the dark," a joyless coupling between two people who have ceased to communicate with each other in any meaningful sense.

In contrast with the limited lives of these two women, Yolande's uninhibited sexuality and her healthy sense of self provide an attractive alternative to the narrow notion of feminine potential that the Walshes' version of Catholicism entails. Bernard's American lover provides a starkly contrasting figure which embodies the possibilities for women who are largely free from externally imposed expectations of role and behaviour but who have, nevertheless, a highly developed moral sense. With a strength which comes from a firm foundation of guilt free self-knowledge and a lifestyle chosen rather than imposed, Yolande is able to facilitate Bernard's transition from resignation to hope. Bernard's encounter with Yolande and their subsequent relationship is presented with wry irony as a sort of felix culpa. Yolande is the motorist who knocks down Bernard's father when he looks right, rather than left, as he steps out into the busy Hawaiian traffic. Her concerned enquiries about his father's recovery lead to the establishment of a friendship between Bernard and Yolande. Yolande recognizes in Bernard a refreshing honesty that had been missing in her marriage to her "son-of-a-bitch" ex-husband, Lewis, and Bernard is put at his ease by Yolande's relaxed and open attitude to sexual matters. While Jack recovers in hospital from the injuries he sustains, ironically, in "Paradise," the platonic friendship between Yolande and Bernard slowly becomes sexual, under Yolande's sure and steady guidance. As Yolande points out with her habitual candidness, Bernard ought not "to go from total chastity to hands-on fucking in one move" (270). She initiates a process of sexual "therapy" which "builds up to full intercourse in easy stages" (271). Yolande's practice of treating sex as if it were an art or recreation slowly effects Bernard's cure from sexual dysfunction and transforms him into a competent lover. To Bernard, the failed priest and celibate, Yolande is the secular high priestess who mediates for him the graces of sexual fulfilment and freedom from guilt.
Lodge's novels are always highly intertextual, to both serious and comic effect. *Paradise News* is no exception. Bernard's sexual history is portrayed by means of a witty inversion of the myth of Daphne and Apollo, rather unkindly at the expense of Bernard's former fiancée and ex-cachetumen, Daphne. To great comic effect, Lodge juxtaposes God, the cosmic lover of Process Theology with Bernard, the inept lover and failed priestly conduit of God's sacramental grace upon earth. Bernard's attempts to overcome with the buxom Daphne the effects of decades of celibacy and sublimation end in "a fiasco." As a sexual innocent, Bernard's image of "the naked female form" had been "something chaste, classical and ideal, derived [he] supposed from icons like the Venus de Milo and Botticelli's Venus" (217). Daphne's body, however, seems to represent a caricature of this curvaceous and highly desirable classical ideal: "Daphne in the nude was more like a life-sized version of one of those female fertility figurines you find in museum collections of ethnic exotica, with huge breasts, swelling bellies and jutting buttocks, crudely carved or shaped out of wood and terracotta" (217-8). As skilfully as the editor of a pornographic magazine, Bernard's imagination has excluded from his fantasies all but the erotic aspects of female anatomy. The conspicuous functionality of Daphne's body unnerves Bernard and provides amusement for the reader at Daphne's expense and, by implication, at the expense of all largely proportioned women. Pursued rather than pursuing, this Apollo flees from his Daphne, "terrified of the sexual side of marriage" and overwhelmed by the memory of Daphne's "pendulous breasts, which had swung "to and fro like bells, tolling the doom of their relationship" (31).

Yolande, however, has a nicely proportioned and well-preserved body that parallels the perfect balance of her personality. Bernard's sexual rehabilitation is made easier by the fact that while he must overcome his feelings of fear and inadequacy, he does not have to re-adjust his idealized image of the female form. Yolande Miller, whose character combines the exotic and the practical, as her name implies, is a "personal counsellor." As a character, Yolande lacks the "roundness" of the other principal characters, appearing, rather, to be a construction that
incorporates all that a repressed Catholic such as Bernard might need to facilitate his sexual liberation. She is a sex therapist with a heart of gold. In her relationship with Bernard, her combined sensuality and common sense help free him from his sexual inhibitions and the burden of guilt he carries as a result of his failed vocation. As early as their first conversation, Yolande enables Bernard to "feel less oppressed" with the guilt he has assumed for his father's accident. As a result he feels that he has confessed and received absolution, and reflects that "perhaps counsellors would be the priests of the future" (130). This prediction provides an early clue to the priestly role that Yolande is to fill in this story of Bernard's metamorphosis. Furthermore, as the facilitator of Bernard's recovery from impotence, Yolande is priestlike in her ability to bring back Bernard from the spiritual death of which his impotence is both a symbol and a symptom.

A comparison between the part played by Yolande in Bernard's life and Clare's attempts, in *The Picturegoers*, to convert Mark, provides a useful means of tracing the development of Lodge's understanding of the possibilities for women within the Catholic faith. Clare's difficulty in being honest with herself regarding her motives in facilitating Mark's return to the practice of his faith are founded in her lack of self-knowledge and her ambivalence in sexual matters. Having grown up in a home in which sexuality had been a forbidden subject, Clare has never come to terms with her own sexuality and cannot bring herself to recognize the erotic nature of her feelings toward Mark. Thus, she prevaricates, confusing both herself and Mark as she vacillates between virginal decorum and submission to Mark's advances. Lodge's point is that in order to effect desirable change in another, one must first be very sure of oneself. Untrammelled by externally imposed and preconceived notions of correct behaviour, Yolande has been free to construct herself according to an internal sense of morality and to assist in the reconstruction of Bernard as he struggles to discard the false façade which has obscured his true character for so long.

Although the Catholic women in *Paradise News*, Ursula and Tess, are able, to some
extent, to recognize and reject the false notions which have limited their freedom and happiness, it is Yolande's open-minded and guilt free secular philosophy that Lodge seems to hold up as the yardstick against which to measure their faith. Perhaps at the time that he wrote the novel, Lodge had difficulty envisioning a Catholic woman who could reconcile Yolande's insistence on thinking for herself with the obedience demanded by the Church. For this reason, perhaps, he places Yolande philosophically in the secular sphere of moral relativism. By the time Therapy was written, however, Lodge's understanding of the Catholic faith had changed sufficiently for him to create realistically the character of Maureen, a Catholic woman at once devout and willing to fashion for herself a personal form of the Catholic faith in which she ignores orthodox moral law in the interests of temporal happiness.

As Tess and Ursula have been, Yolande has been betrayed by her husband in infidelity. Rather than meekly accepting his treachery, however, Yolande unashamedly admits that she wants revenge. She is in touch with her feelings and able to acknowledge them without shame. For Yolande, anger and hurt are not feelings to be curbed as unworthy and unChristlike, they are natural responses to such betrayals and must be addressed rather than repressed. Similarly, when she senses Bernard's fear of her she reacts by openly confronting him with her hurt feelings, asking him, "what's the matter with you, Bernard? Do you think I'm trying to seduce you, or something? Hey? Is that it? You think I'm some kind of sex-starved deserted wife whose tongue is hanging out for a screw? Is that it?" (237). This direct approach to Bernard's reluctance enables him to recognize not only the foolishness of his behaviour, but its hurtful effect upon Yolande. With a sense of the confusion his behaviour has generated for Yolande, he determines to explain to her why he has "found it so difficult to have an ordinary, friendly relationship with a woman" (236). Thus Yolande's open and honest approach to misunderstandings, unrestrained by traditional notions of correct womanly behaviour, serves to foster openness and honesty, bringing the couple closer together rather than driving them farther apart.
Once Yolande has read Bernard's diary and understands his sexual reluctance, she is able to dismiss the feelings of rejection she had felt and to offer to provide his sexual education. At this point, Yolande's priestly function is emphasized by the words in which her offer is couched: "I could teach you. I could show you how. I could heal you, Bernard, I know I could" (269). Yet, in emphasizing Yolande's sacramental role in Bernard's life, Lodge is careful to make it clear that Yolande's sexual generosity is not a product of romantic love. The motivating force behind Yolande's offer is compassion rather than love. She is prepared to teach him the art of lovemaking, Yolande explains to Bernard, because she likes him and because she feels sorry for him (269). Again, in the character of Yolande, Lodge offers the idea with which the orthodox Catholic writer and critic, Piers Paul Read takes issue in his essay on the "Decline and Fall of the Catholic Novel," that "compassion expressed in [the] sexual act transcends any sin that might once have been explicit in the adulterous act" (20). Such "subjective moral judgements," Read argues, "appeal to a society where moral relativism is the norm" and one in which the "dogmatic certainties of the pre-conciliar Catholic novel that once provided such a rich source of drama are no longer credible" (20).

In Read's own novels, certainly, the tension between Church law and individual desire is effectively portrayed. The marked difference between these two writers in terms of their Catholic faith is that as an orthodox Catholic, Read is committed to justifying the ways of the God to man within the framework of Catholic moral law, while at the same time avoiding (although he does not always succeed) the overt didacticism of earlier Catholic fiction. As a liberal Catholic, in contrast, Lodge is committed to exploring the means by which his characters can achieve happiness in this life, free of the guilt and fear of punishment which have, in Lodge's view, dogged their heels until "at some point in the nineteen-sixties, Hell disappeared" (How Far Can You Go? 113). In Lodge's view, now that the fear of eternal punishment has gone, the kind of renunciation and self-sacrifice which the traditional character from Catholic fiction had been required to make, is pointless. Yolande embodies the concept of self-fulfilment and a morality
that transcends simplistic notions of right and wrong, replacing moral certainty with what Read calls the "sophisticated moral conundrums" of moral relativity.

The fact that Yolande's efforts to resurrect Bernard's repressed sexual self are successful -- "for the first time since childhood, he [feels] alive from his fingertips to his toes" (273) -- and that his sexual reawakening results in the development of a wholeness of character he had previously lacked, serves to underline the point that Bernard makes in a lecture he gives on his return to Rummidge. Perhaps anticipating criticism of his application of moral relativism in solving Bernard's problems, the narrator places in Bernard's mouth a justification for subjective moral judgements, returning to an earlier theme, the loss of the fear of hell. "Traditional Christianity," Bernard tells his students, had been "essentially teleological and apocalyptic" (352).

In making the point he quotes the Catechism, which states the purpose of human life to be the service of God in this world in exchange for happiness with Him in the next (352). The educated and thoughtful modern generation, according to Bernard, no longer finds credible traditional Christian concepts of heaven and hell. Thus, "the focus of modern theology has turned more and more upon the Christian transformation of this life" (354), which might lead one to wonder whether anything is left that "is distinguishable from secular humanism" (355). In searching for an answer, Bernard turns the question on its head to ask what humanism has that it has not derived from Christianity. He wryly suggests that in the sheep and goats parable recorded in Matthew chapter twenty-five, Jesus anticipates the demise of supernatural mythology which would occur in the twentieth century in leaving the "essentially humanist message" that it is not "fervency of religious faith, or orthodoxy of religious doctrine, or regularity of worship, or observance of the commandments, or indeed anything "religious" by which the returning Son of Man will recognize his true followers, but by the good they have done "in an unselfish but pragmatic and essentially this-worldly way" (356). According to this definition, Yolande is clearly fitted to be a leader of the flock, a priestess of the modern, emancipated Catholic. Bernard could never have conceived such a lecture had he not met and experienced Yolande's patience.
and generosity, and indeed, her spectre seems to hover behind Bernard as he expounds what is essentially her response to "Walsh" Catholicism.

In a less overt way, Aunt Ursula echoes the idea that many of the forms and rituals of the Catholic faith have become not only irrelevant, but also a hindrance to a living faith. However, she is astute enough to realize that the disappearance of hell from Catholic consciousness might leave the faithful with no reason to be good. She apparently regrets the passing of logical and satisfying beliefs such as the notion that good behaviour will be rewarded and evil punished. These two rather different responses to effects of the disappearance of the fear of hell, especially with their light and ironic tone, suggest not that Lodge is providing a definitive answer to the problem of Catholic guilt and repression, but that he is presenting the problem and exploring possible solutions to it. This approach accords perfectly with Lodge's personal theology as outlined by Bernard Bergonzi:

[Lodge] remains a practising member of the Church, though he is agnostic about the ultimate reality behind the symbolic and metaphorical languages of liturgy and scripture. Lodge acknowledges that by traditional standards, including those that he professed as a young man, he is probably a heretic; but he believes that many theologians, including Catholic ones, would now hold similar views. (David Lodge 43)

In the absence of dogmatic certainty and in light of the burden which traditional Catholic notions of sexual morality place upon the individual, Lodge seems to say, in Paradise News, that subjective moral judgements, when made in an attitude of compassion, can be "saving" in the sense that Jesus intended in his parable of the sheep and goats.

Lodge's latest novel, Therapy, provides, in the characters of Tubby and Maureen, a codicil to the fictional discussion of sexual relationship entered into, not out of love, but out of compassion. It is difficult to imagine any woman being gratified by sexual overtures made out of pity, even when, as in Bernard's and Yolande's case, their sexual affair is followed by a deep affection and the possibility of a permanent love relationship. In Therapy, however, the nature of the relationship between Lawrence "Tubby" Passmore and Maureen is explained, in part, in terms of Tubby's various reactions, over time, to the breasts of his childhood sweetheart. The
youthful Maureen's half-reluctant responses to Tubby's fumbling advances had been understandable in a young Catholic girl brought up in the 1950s. In fact, her struggle to resist her need to express her feelings toward Tubby in sexual terms in obedience to the moral tenets of her faith are as quaintly endearing as Clare's in *The Picturegoers*. However, her very different responses to Tubby's sexual overtures toward the end of the novel, when she is middle-aged, seem disappointingly self-demeaning. When viewed in the light of her strength of character when it comes to the fulfilment of her sexual needs outside her unsatisfactory marriage, her acceptance of Tubby's compassion in the form of sexual overtures is, at first glance, surprising.

In Tubby's memory, as he searches for the woman he had courted as a teenager, he and Maureen take on the form of traditional stereotypes. Maureen is remembered as a beautiful, blushing virgin whose body had hinted at delights all the more enticing since they were forbidden and untried. When he and Maureen had first met, Tubby had been an adolescent with raging hormones and no particular religious convictions who had been determined to overcome what had seemed to him to be no more than scruples based on outdated superstitions. In his memory, couched in images at once sensual and Elysian, Maureen's perfect young breasts symbolize for Tubby the wonder, the ideals, and the hopes of his younger self. He recalls:

> I gently released a breast, the left one, from its cup. I rolled it into my palm like a ripe fruit...so soft, so smooth, so tender, so firm, so elastic, so mysteriously gravity-defying. I lifted the breast a centimetre, and weighed it in my cupped palm, then gently lowered my hand again until it just fitted the shape without supporting it. That it should hang there, proud and firm, seemed as miraculous a phenomenon as the Earth itself floating in space. (246)

Looking back over the intervening decades, Tubby sees this early sexual experience as a formative moment in which the ripe beauty of the female breast had become for him a symbol of a world of wonder and opportunity ready and waiting for him. When, in middle-age, he finds that the breast which had for so long symbolized hope and opportunity has succumbed to disease and is, in fact, no longer "there," Tubby must both re-assess his feeling toward Maureen and re-envisage the symbol which had provided a focus for the hopes and dreams he once had. Like Maureen who has suffered the trauma of physical disfigurement, Tubby has to accept the
real in place of the ideal.

For Maureen it is a tremendous relief that Tubby is not repelled by her disfigurement, especially as the sexual side of her marriage had disappeared with her breast because her husband had not been able to "get the image [of her scar] out of his head" (314). She tells Tubby that his kissing her scar is "the nicest thing anybody ever did to [her]" (307). When Maureen's pilgrimage is over, however, Maureen refuses to leave her husband since her marriage, although "sexless," is not "loveless" (316). She takes the pragmatic and morally relative view that orthodox Catholics such as Piers Paul Read deplore, that staying with her husband while conducting an affair with Tubby will "simplify things" and hurt nobody. Tubby, the agnostic, is happy with this arrangement, content to be at once Maureen's lover and her husband's friend as they all go "off together for a little autumn break" (321). Tubby -- and perhaps Lodge himself -- does not ask how Maureen, as a practising Catholic, "squares it with her conscience" (321). Perhaps they espouse the view expressed by Greene's liberal priest in The Heart of the Matter, that "the Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart" (271). Whether Maureen has understood Tubby's complex response to her maimed body, or whether she is simply grateful that someone is prepared to make love to her in spite of it, is not clear from the text. However, in view of her insight into her husband's inability to come to terms with her scar and her compassionate response to his sexual rejection, it seems possible that Maureen understands that Tubby has grown beyond the notion of sexuality as mere physical attraction and has replaced his adolescent fantasies of her with a maturer love which is more than skin deep.

The "erratic line of [Maureen's] scar" (307) which Tubby's finger traces seems to symbolize the path of his life during the years in which the image of her perfect breast had seemed to hold up the promise of hope and fulfilment. In kissing Maureen's scar and in accepting her body's imperfection, Tubby embraces the reality of his own life, with its successes and failures. At the same time, his gesture affirms the fact that his feelings for Maureen are not
based on so flimsy a foundation as lust. Maureen's loss forces Tubby to view his own problems from a more realistic perspective:

I won't say that the problems and disappointments of my life seemed trivial beside Maureen's, but they certainly seemed smaller. Not only had she lost a beloved son -- she had lost a breast, the part of a woman's body which defines her sexual identity perhaps more obviously than any other. And although Maureen herself would certainly have said that the former loss was the greater, it was the latter which affected me more, perhaps because I had never known [her son], but I had known that breast, known it and loved it -- and written about it. My memoir has turned into an elegy. (308).

Thus, what on the surface look like sexual overtures made out of pity and justified by compassion are perhaps Tubby's non-verbal means of proclaiming that Maureen is more than a set of physical attributes which define her sexual identity, and that his love for her encompasses her whole being, goes far deeper than mere flesh. However, the novel is written from the male point of view, and Maureen is a supporting character created in order to facilitate the evolution of Tubby, and her gratitude -- "Thanks Tubby, you're a darling" (308) -- certainly invites the conclusion that to Lodge, women such as Maureen, whose bodies are less than perfect, ought to be grateful to men who are prepared to overlook their imperfections. It is difficult to imagine a woman writer leaving herself open to such a charge.

Over a long career, Lodge has chronicled in his fiction the struggle of English Catholics to reclaim, as matters of individual conscience, moral decisions which only recently they had allowed the Church to decide for them. Lodge seems to applaud the way in which Catholics have adopted those secular moral values that seem to them to improve the quality of their lives without jeopardizing their immortal souls. In Lodge's fiction, the compromises made between Church law and individual conscience are not always comfortable but, by and large, his characters manage to remain Catholics while ignoring those teachings of the Church, most often related to matters of sexual behaviour, which they judge outdated or unreasonable.
Chapter III

Mary Gordon

Like David Lodge, Mary Gordon is concerned, especially in her earlier novels, with the lives of Catholics as they emerge from the Catholic "ghetto" into the mainstream of secular society. Gordon reveals in her fiction a nostalgia for the comforting certitudes of the pre-conciliar Church while revealing her impatience with what she sees as outmoded notions of sexual morality which the Church refuses to lay aside. Like David Lodge, Mary Gordon is also very aware of the correlation that outsiders make between Catholics and sexual preoccupations. In a 1980 interview with Diana Cooper-Clark, Gordon voices her belief that American Catholicism, with its Irish Jansenist legacy, makes a satisfying sexual life very difficult to achieve. Gordon goes further than Lodge, whose Catholic characters quietly adapt Church teaching on sexuality to accord with what, according to their own conscience, they judge to be moral, while continuing to practice the faith and to receive the sacraments with a clear conscience. Gordon tells Cooper-Clark,

the sexy people get out of the Church; they have to. What you're left with is a marvellous ascetic type who stays in the Church, or a person like Flannery O'Connor who's a virgin through and through, one of those wise and fierce Antigones. They can stay and be quite interesting and quite admirable, but the sexual people have to get out. (271)

Leaving aside the rather unfair judgement of Flannery O'Connor who, had she not been an chronic invalid, might well have married, Gordon seems to agree that the emphasis upon sexual sin which outsiders perceive is justified, and to suggest that those who are conscience-bound to break Church moral law concerning sexual behaviour have no alternative but to "get out." Presumably, Lodge's liberal Catholic characters would accuse Gordon of throwing out the baby of dogma with the bath water of redundant sexual mores.

The difference in attitude between Lodge and Gordon in the matter of sexuality seems to be based in part upon issues of gender. As Paul Giles points out, "in the late twentieth century, the relationship between the Catholic Church and American women is one of the
most frequent areas of theological tension and artistic interrogation" (513), and Mary Gordon has placed herself squarely within this area of enquiry. As a woman and a feminist, Gordon sees little cause for amusement in a religious ideology that she perceives systematically to direct most of the blame for human sexual depravity toward the female sex. This misogyny, Gordon's novels suggest, is responsible for the kind of excess that Isabel, the heroine of her first novel, Final Payments, falls prey to when she leaves the ascetic and spiritual world of her father, in which, as a woman, she had been little more that a bystander, serving the needs of her father's decaying body while neglecting the needs of her own, and waiting upon her father's friends, the priests who fumbled to remember her name as she refreshed their drinks (1). From her feminist perspective, Gordon sees Catholic women such as Isabel as doubly ghettoized, first, as products of a misogynist Church, and second, as members of a misogynist society. In Gordon's view, true equality with men in society at large is an unrealized dream for women as the millennium approaches. Furthermore, according to Gordon, the Catholic Church not only condones secular misogynist practices; it also retains many of its own blind spots regarding the rights of women.

By the time Gordon's first novel was published, it had become clear that while the proclamations of the Second Vatican Council had encouraged the laity to take greater responsibility for their moral lives, Church law concerning such matters as birth-control, divorce, and the ordination of women, was probably not going to be changed. In the work of Gordon, for whom, as Carol Iannone has pointed out, "feminism comes nearest to Catholicism as an informing framework of values" (62), the main focus -- although by no means her only preoccupation -- has remained the struggle of her female Catholic protagonists to come to terms with their Catholic heritage and to assimilate themselves within the modern secular world.

Gordon's career as a novelist began almost two decades after the publication of Lodge's first novel, The Picturegoers, by which time the majority of Catholics in both Britain
and America had decided to follow their own consciences on matters of sexuality and birth control. This fact accounts, perhaps, for the fact that for Gordon's characters, birth control is no longer a burning issue of contention. American sociologist Andrew Greeley argues that by the time Pope Paul VI issued his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, which expressly forbade the use of the pill, "the laity had already made up their minds that the pill and later all forms of birth control were morally acceptable" (95). In Britain, too, "by the mid-1970s only a tiny minority [of Catholics] was prepared to give unqualified assent to the official teaching [on birth-control]" (*Roman Catholic Beliefs in England* 188). Thus, by the end of the 1970s, Catholics on both sides of the Atlantic were less preoccupied with Church law concerning birth control than with the wider issues that followed from their having taken up the invitation of the Vatican II documents to think for themselves. The controversy which had begun with questions about the meaning of the sexual act and the proper conduct of Catholics in their sexual lives led to a broader debate about the role of individual conscience, a controversy in which liberal Catholics attempted to square the seemingly incompatible values of Church and secular world as to what constitutes the moral life. Like David Lodge, Gordon focuses upon such questions as how to reconcile such Catholic notions as the importance of sacrifice and renunciation with the emphasis placed upon self-fulfilment in the secular world. Her newly liberated female characters are juxtaposed with (frequently male) characters, such as Isabel's father (*Final Payments*) and Father Cyprian (*The Company of Women*), who champion orthodoxy and who continue to reemphasize what they see as the enduring value and validity of Catholic moral law as interpreted by the hierarchical Church.

A comparison between the couples in David Lodge's novel, *How Far Can you Go?*, which was published in 1981, and the central characters in Gordon's 1978 novel, *Final Payments*, suggests that in the decade following the Second Vatican Council, English Catholics tended to try hard to retain their Catholic identity, despite their misgivings about the direction the institutional Church had taken. American Catholics, such as *Final Payments'*
Isabel Moore and her friends Liz and Eleanor, however, leave the Church and the practice of Catholicism altogether rather than attempt a compromise between the law of the Church and their newly embraced secular values. For these American Catholic women, without the daily rituals and practices of the faith that had kept them apart from the world and within the Catholic enclave, their faith has no substance. For Isabel, Eleanor, and Liz, unlike Lodge's Catholics, the central "truths" of the Catholic theology -- Christ's saving death and resurrection -- have little further relevance. Theirs seems never to have been a living faith focused upon the grace of God dispensed through the sacraments of the Church. Rather, it had amounted to a tiresome catalogue of inherited rituals and practices which had kept them from enjoying their fair share of life's pleasures. Lodge's Catholics, however, seem able to distinguish between Church moral law, which they believe can legitimately be questioned, and the proclamations of Jesus which they see as eternal truths which bind them together as Catholics despite their doubts about the validity of institutional Church teaching, particularly on sexual matters.

Gordon's Isabel rejects both Catholic practice and Catholic dogma, although vestiges of her Catholic education remain in Isabel's subconscious so that her reconstruction within the secular world is fraught with problems of guilt and doubt as she forges a new identity upon the foundations of her former self. The past and its ingrained habits of thought, Isabel finds, are difficult to leave behind. Despite these different responses to the "open windows" of Vatican II, however, both Lodge's and Gordon's characters wrestle with the deeply ingrained Catholic notion that a life of renunciation has greater merit than one of self-fulfilment (which the Church sees as self-indulgence) and the characters of both writers regret the passing of the dogmatic certainties which the Church had provided before Catholics were encouraged to think for themselves and which had made life seem simpler and safer.

Each of Gordon's first two Catholic novels, Final Payments and The Company of Women focuses upon a Catholic woman and her integration in the secular world after an
insular Catholic childhood. In Final Payments, Gordon's heroine Isabel's late emergence from the narrow world of her invalid father's Catholicism into a secular world is fraught with the complex problems and temptations for which her life in the Catholic ghetto had not prepared her. The novel is structured as a bildungsroman, chronicling Isabel's gradual education in "the ways of the world," but Gordon does not provide a neat conclusion to Isabel's emancipation. The sense of having been somehow damaged or cheated by their Catholic childhood is a constant bone of contention for Isabel and her friends, Eleanor and Liz. They miss the comforting certainty that the Church had provided, while believing that the price exacted from the faithful for their certitude is their autonomy. However, as they distance themselves from those who continue to rely on the absolutes of the institutional Church despite the fact that it does not make them happy, Isabel and her friends identify themselves with a superior ideological group, those with "advantages," such as good looks and intelligence and the courage and ability to think for themselves. Ann-Janine Morey suggests that the "final payments" required of Isabel are due for the "terrifying gift of incarnation" (1060). However, Isabel and her friend Eleanor make it clear that they believe payments are levied only against the fortunate few whose incarnation is accompanied by the "unfair advantages" of physical beauty and intelligence.

The novel begins at the point at which Isabel's father's death liberates her from her role of caretaker and she enters the modern world, her "eyes bright, [her] face flushed and foolishly smiling," and as "sure of [herself] as an athlete or a well-fed dog" (59). With the friendship and support of her life-long friends, Isabel survives a rude awakening to the dangers of her own nature and to the complex needs of others to arrive at a compromise which acknowledges her own limitations and those of the people around her. The novel chronicles the humbling of Isabel, from the moment she throws herself, body and soul, into the world her father's needs had kept her from enjoying. It traces Isabel's painful assimilation into the secular sphere where she swings from one extreme response to another, and
portrays her dawning understanding of the limitations of her new life and its inevitable connection with the one she has left behind.

Isabel begins her narrative with an account of her father's funeral and her bleak reminiscences of a life spent caring for him during the long years of his illness. Renunciation and self-sacrifice had characterized the first thirty years of her life. Isabel's mother had died in a traffic accident when Isabel was still a small child, and she had been raised by her fanatically orthodox Catholic father as the centre of his world and his hope for the future. Isabel's father had embodied for Isabel and for all who knew him the spirituality which the Catholic Church has traditionally equated with the male. Isabel, meanwhile, had ministered to the daily needs of the distorted and inept body, which her father had despised, even when it was healthy, with "a passion of mind and soul that he reserved for God" (41).

Isabel does not begrudge her father the years which she spent nursing him after his stroke. As she looks back, recalling her father's character, his "force" to which "no woman could have approached" (41) and his rage at his atrophied body, Isabel reflects:

I was devoted to his anger and his sorrow and my days were used up for the comfort of his body, which I could effect, and his mind, which I could not touch. And if I went to sleep weeping for the absurd and utterly needless suffering of my father's body, I awoke in the morning to relieve it. And if those years were lost to me in ways that are impossible to calculate and impossible to regain, I knew why. I did this for the person I most loved, with the passion of mind and soul that he reserved for God. (41)

In these reflections, Isabel acknowledges, perhaps unconsciously, an important aspect of her character, the trait that leads to her headlong rush into engagement with secular life. Isabel has inherited her father's passion, but she allows it to fuel her physical desires instead of sublimating it in spiritual fervour as her father had done. Her father's death deprives Isabel of a focus for the passion that she had channelled into -- perhaps sublimated in -- her daily care of his body. As Isabel enters the secular world after her father's death, her passionate nature seeks out human recipients and is translated into sexual relationships.

Isabel's role as selfless companion and nurse to her father looks from the outside, and
is indeed taken by her neighbours and friends to be, a saintliness which enables her single-mindedly to ignore her own needs without resenting the role in which the Catholic notion of a daughter's duty had cast her. Looking back on this time, from the chaos of her life in the outside world, Isabel regrets the loss of her simple designation as "a saint." After her re-birth, symbolized by her discarding of the accumulated clutter of her life with her father -- she had long ago ceased practising his faith -- and buying herself new and becoming clothes, Isabel enters a complex and bewildering new world in which nothing will ever seem simple again.

The character of Isabel is constructed upon a framework of juxtapositions and analogies which, while suggestive of various feminine stereotypes, do not detract from her individuality. Isabel is at once a character and, at various stages in her journey, a recognizable type of Catholic womanhood that Gordon believes must be re-imagined if women are to achieve their full potential alongside men. In addition, Isabel is clearly to be viewed vis-à-vis several of the novel's other characters. Gordon juxtaposes Isabel with the figure of her austere and orthodox Catholic father, portrays her in contrast with the figures of the two women with whom she has shared a friendship since they were Catholic high school students together, and with Margaret Casey, in terms of her beauty and intelligence, which are lacking in the elderly housekeeper. Clearly, the connection between advantage and obligation is an important consideration for Gordon. She continues to explore this idea in her latest novel, Spending, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Like Anne Redmon, in her novels Emily Stone and Second Sight, which are the subject of a later chapter, Gordon's employs the first person narrative point of view in Final Payments to allow her heroine to trace her personal history in the context of her later understanding. As the novel's narrator, Isabel looks back upon the years she has spent caring for her father in an effort to understand the events of more recent years in the light of her past. As Isabel tells her story, the reader is apprised of elements in her cloistered life which have a crucial bearing on her responses to the world she encounters beyond the shelter of her Catholic past. The
seeming simplicity of Isabel's life with her father -- the routines of the sick room and the necessary narrowness of a life spent in the daily care of an invalid -- belies the complexity of their relationship. Isabel recalls an intense bond between herself and her father in which he sought to breed "a Mary," since "he knew that Christ was right in telling Martha that her sister had chosen the better part" (28). Her father had been grooming Isabel to be the inheritor of his intellectual life and his traditional Catholicism.

The combination of Professor Moore's narrow orthodoxy and his increasing physical weakness had made him appear deceptively childlike. Isabel reflects that his life had been "as clear as that of a child who dies before the age of reason" (2). In fact, so certain had he been of the purity of the faith he espoused and of the indisputability of its claims, he had believed that "the refusal of anyone in the twentieth century to become part of the Catholic Church was not pitiable; it was "malicious and wilful" (2). However, his love for Isabel has neither the simplicity nor the childlike innocence of his religious faith. They "were connected by the flesh," Isabel remembers, both through a blood relationship and through the constant and intimate physical contact made necessary by her father's failing health. Isabel's vivid descriptions of the inexorable decay of her father's flesh serves, by contrast, to draw attention to her youth and beauty, which had been "wasted" during the years of her father's illness. Isabel remembers and describes the sensory aspects of caring for her father: the smells, the indignities his body was forced to endure at her hands, and the inexorable decay of his flesh.

While his body slowly failed, Professor Moore had hung onto what he had left, his "orthodoxy," and had held out for "the purest and the finest and the most refined sense of truth" (2). Isabel, meanwhile, had been "moving his body around...sliding bedpans under him, looking at the misery of his buttocks" and inhaling "the smell of his urine and faeces that, loving him, [she] ought never to have known" (3). Her father's slow death and her death-in-life as his nurse seem to Isabel to be reminders of the wages of sin. Professor Moore's stroke had followed so quickly upon his discovery of her in bed with his only pupil that Isabel had
taken it to be divine retribution for her indulgence in the sins of the flesh.

Professor Moore's reaction to finding his beloved daughter in bed with his pupil had been more typical of a betrayed husband than an outraged father. He had told David, "you have ruined her life" and "you have ruined mine" (19). Looking back, Isabel wonders if she had intended her father to discover her affair with David in order to "punish [him]...for his lack of attention to [her] obvious adulthood, for his lack of jealousy at the intrusion of so clear a rival" (21). After her father's stroke, which follows so closely upon her fall from grace," Isabel falls back upon the Catholic concepts of sin and atonement upon which she had been raised. Her father's collapse provides her with the opportunity to live out a "fantasy of public penance" by giving up her life for him and interpreting his illness as a punishment devised by her godlike father. She interprets "the stoppage of his brain, the failure of his...body as the result of the pleasure of [hers]" (210).

Isabel's ambivalence about the morality of her sexual behaviour has its origin, in part, in the traumatic aftermath of her father's discovery of her in bed with his disciple, David. This event helps form the foundation of her views both of herself and of her place in the world, and creates the core of guilt that later erupts in the form of a fierce self-hatred when the distraught wife of her married lover, Hugh, confronts her. Furthermore, Isabel's relationship with her father had been a close one, particularly in the absence of her mother, and each had loved the other with an intensity which Isabel comes later to realize had bordered upon the incestuous. In the years following her father's death that the novel covers, Isabel arrives at a realization of the near incestuous aspects of the intense love they had shared. Her jealousy of her friend, Eleanor, who confesses to having had "elaborate sexual fantasies" about Professor Moore (54) and the possessiveness which make her want "to make [Eleanor] pay for the crime of having loved [her] father too" (55), reveal to Isabel the fact that the love she had shared with her father had become as distorted as his diseased body during the time when Isabel's sensuality had had only her beloved father on which to focus itself.
In her forthright manner, Liz articulates the passion Isabel's father had felt toward his daughter: "My God, how he loved you. I've still never seen anything like it. How I used to envy you. I still do. No one will ever love you like that again, you know...It'll be hard for you, Isabel. You can't help but expect that kind of love again and you'll never get it. You've had your great love, and you can't expect another" (80). In his great love for her, Isabel's father had been godlike. Just as the certainty of God's love and mercy, mediated through the sacraments of the Catholic Church, sustains the faithful, so the certainty of her father's love had protected and supported Isabel throughout her childhood. In her sexual affair with David Lowe, to carry the analogy further, Isabel had committed the "original sin" which would turn her father's love to anger.

Isabel's competitive relationship with her father's housekeeper, Margaret Casey, has also had a strong influence upon Isabel's development. Margaret had "kept home" for Isabel and her father while Isabel was a schoolgirl. She had entertained dreams of marrying the Professor until at thirteen, with the complicity of her father, Isabel had "got rid of her" (25). At her father's funeral, Isabel looks back "with perfect triumph at what she had taken away from that woman" (24). She had despised Margaret for her ugliness, her stupidity, and for being one of "that network of Irish daughters, orphaned in their forties by the death of an invalid parent, "and working "always for less than minimum wages at jobs found by some priest, some lawyer, some doctor, among their own kind" (25). As Gordon remarks in an interview with M. Deiter Keyishian, "one of the things that is good about the Church is it's a place for people to go who aren't winning in the world's terms" (73). The winners, however, such as Isabel, Eleanor, and Liz, have no need of the Church, although they cannot quite manage to shrug off its values.

The basis of Isabel's hatred of Margaret is her fear of succumbing to Margaret's fate. The Catholic ghetto is rife with women such as Margaret, women without money or training, whose chances of marriage, always slim, have faded away. In Catholic fiction they are often
portrayed as stereotypical spinsters, bitter harridans who scold the priests for whom they keep house as much as if they were shrewish wives. As a young girl, Isabel had kept her fear of a fate such as Margaret's at bay by taking care not to become like Margaret. "The certainty of my childhood I owe to Margaret," she remembers, "Margaret's unattractiveness and stupidity made the shape of my life possible. I always knew who I was; I was not Margaret...I invented myself in her image, as her opposite" (26-7). Isabel's father had encouraged her in this endeavour; he had been "breeding a Mary" in Isabel while Margaret performed the dreary chores of a Martha.

Although Margaret is portrayed as a lonely, pathetic woman who is worthy of pity, Isabel's jealousy and fear make compassion for Margaret impossible for her. Furthermore, Isabel's guilt at having taken away Margaret's one hope of happiness feeds her fear that Margaret is "one of those magical creatures who [have] been given vision as a payment for ugliness" (36) and that she can see into Isabel's darker motives, her relief at the death which has liberated her, and her unnatural possessiveness of her father while he lived. Margaret has become, for Isabel, an alter-ego, the dark Jungian shadow of her public self, "knocking" on the door of her conscience "like some rodent trapped behind a wall" (30).

The vestiges of Isabel's discarded faith are clearly discernible in her belief that compensations, such as "vision," are awarded to those who do not have the advantages of good looks, intelligence, and amicability, and in her belief that those who have these privileges will be punished for taking advantage of them. As Carol Iannone has argued, Isabel's -- and perhaps Gordon's -- world is divided into winners and losers. There are those, such as Isabel and her two friends, who, in their beauty and intelligence, inspire "particular" love in others, and "rejects," such as Margaret, who are unlovable as individuals, and who must fall back upon religion for their consolation. However, Isabel understands that whereas those with advantages don't mind loving others for the love of God and for humanity, the "losers" do not want to be loved in general but for themselves: "Hence Margaret, and the yellow look around
her eyes of having been cheated" (97).

As Isabel takes her place within the secular world which welcomes the beautiful and the talented, the spectre of Margaret "haunts" her, reminding her of the advantages she has and the kind of woman she might have become had she been without them. For Gordon, the great weakness of the Catholic Church is not only its insistence upon the renunciation of temporal pleasure in favour of eternal bliss, but also the inadequacy of its charity designed to ease the pain of those who are not loved for themselves. For Gordon, neither the Church nor the secular world seems to have an answer for the predicament of women such as Margaret whom no one can love, except in a general way as "one of God's poor" (64) and "needy." There is no response to their cry to be loved "in particular," for themselves, although God's grace seems to operate through such people as Father Mulcahy, who loves Margaret, not "neutrally," but with an "engaged love" (64), and in Isabel's friends who "miraculously" love her even when she ceases to love them in return. As Isabel explains the problem, while "people don't mind loving others for the love of God or humanity, no one wants to be loved only because of a general, undiscriminating love" (97). Margaret has been "cheated" of this special kind of love, and it is to her, because of the "unfair advantages" that enable Isabel to be loved for herself, that Isabel must make a final payment.

Like Isabel, her two friends, Eleanor and Liz, have the "unfair advantages" of good looks and intelligence. Neither Eleanor nor Liz likes each other, and Isabel is the link between them, the friend through whose loving perceptions the reader views their attitudes and actions.

Clearly, Isabel has a great capacity for both physical and emotional love and an ability to inspire love in others. In Isabel and her friends, as in the group of friends who make up the company of women in Gordon's novel of that name, Gordon reveals her belief in the capacity of women to build strong and sustaining friendships which are frequently more resilient and more nurturing than their relationships with men. The basis of the close ties between these three women is their shared Catholic childhood. Each of the friends has abandoned the
Catholic faith, although each has chosen a very different response to life in its absence. Both Eleanor and Liz have encountered great difficulties in adapting to the world outside the Catholic ghetto of Queens in which they grew up. Eleanor is now living alone after a long and ultimately disastrous relationship with a married man, and Liz remains in a loveless marriage while conducting a lesbian affair. Both women miss the "sureness" which was a natural by-product of a life lived according to a set of unbending rules. They believe, however, that "having given up the rigors and duties of belief, [they] have no right to its comforts" (66).

When Eleanor and Liz are brought together by Isabel at Liz's farm, it is their shared heritage, their sense of the "abandoned debris of childhood" (Giles 30) which provides the means for overcoming the awkwardness which Liz's and Eleanor's dislike of each other produces. Isabel brings up an event from their school days to bridge the gap that separates them in the present: "The past, I thought. We all share a past. I must fish up something brilliant, something glittering, or the day will be ruined" (127). Soon they are laughing together at the expense of a nun they had all known who has had the temerity, as a celibate, to host a television programme about love, and, thus, the breach between the old friends is healed. They are united in their shared contempt for the role models with which the institutional Church had provided them as they grew up, and in their sense of superiority at having escaped from the Catholic ghetto of their childhood. Furthermore, while none of these women is able to sustain amicable and satisfying relationships with men, their love for each other, based as it is upon their intuitive understanding of each other's needs, is both tolerant and enduring.

As well as conducting very different lifestyles, the three friends are also very different physical types. In her article, "Beyond Updike: Incarnated Love in the Novels of Mary Gordon," Anne-Janine Morey suggests that Gordon uses "the implied correlation between physiognomy and psyche -- or body and soul" as "a different way of handling embodiment," to show that "body and spirit belong together as a team" (1061). The relationship between body
type and character in Isabel and her two friends serves to emphasize the notion central to Gordon's fiction, that "to drown the exuberance of the affectionate flesh," as Morey puts it, is to deform or distort the God-given gift of incarnation. Eleanor's fragile, ethereal beauty betokens a nature more suited for emotional than physical love. She confesses to Isabel that she is "not very good in bed," and that she "doesn't want to go to bed with anyone for the next thirty years" since sex "muddles things," preventing her from "loving well" (54). Liz, in contrast, has the body of "the boy in [her] buried prematurely" (74). Her muscularity and leanness reflect the kind of character traditionally considered masculine, the woman who chooses a lesbian lifestyle because she has lost her ability to respect her husband and men in general. Liz's wiry strength reflects her determination to assume the masculine characteristics she had once admired in her husband but which in him had "no moral basis," and to enter a relationship with another women whose strength of character matches her own. In Gordon's fictional world, male characters seldom possess moral strength.

Isabel's generous curves, when juxtaposed with the fragility of Eleanor and the spareness of Liz, suggest that her sensuous nature is neither to be sublimated, as is Eleanor's, nor to be controlled and channelled in the way that Liz's masterful nature allows. As Liz's husband, John, tells Isabel, in crude terms, "you have a great future ahead of you, honey, the way you need it and those terrific tits" (142). Father Mulcahy, the priest who has witnessed Isabel's growth to maturity as a close friend of her father, puts the same point more delicately: "you ought to be married" (26), he tells Isabel. Thus, it is clear from the beginning that Isabel's strong sexuality will form the basis of her troubles as she emerges from her protected world. Men want to exploit it and the Church would like it safely invested in the marriage bond.

Although Isabel is keen to resume an active sex life as she emerges from the isolation of her father's sick room, her shifting attitude toward her own body is symbolic of the ambivalence she feels toward female sexuality. This fundamental uncertainty leads, at the
climax of the novel, to her attempts to render her body obese and ugly in order to eliminate the risks associated with feminine beauty. Looking back upon the scene in which her father had discovered her in bed with David, what Isabel recalls most vividly is the absurd jiggling of her naked breasts as David's weeping had shaken the bed (19). In her life with her father, with its focus upon the intellect, the female breast had been a ludicrous and shameful intrusion into the superior realm of the spirit. In the remembered frozen moment of discovery, the presence of Isabel’s bare breasts seemed to have signified Isabel's unsuitability for the masculine sphere of the intellect in which her father and his pupil existed. Her large swinging breasts, which in her new life, men find so alluring, had been evidence, to her father, that his training of her in the life of the spirit had not been sufficient to suppress the inferior feminine in Isabel. Later, in Isabel's reluctant lovemaking with John, her breasts are further deprived of significance. They become merely an emblem of tawdry, loveless sex, as John "handle[s] [her] breast as if he were making a meat-ball" (142).

When, while visiting as a social worker, Isabel reveals her breasts to please an old man whose life is "effectively over" (205), she comes to a new understanding of their significance. Her breasts become for her a life-affirming symbol of femininity, the sight of which she can bestow, in an act of generosity, without loss to herself. The sharing of her beauty with this elderly man challenges both her father's and John's attitudes toward the feminine. Catherine Keller has pointed out that the early Christians understood the importance of the breast as a symbol of nurturing and generosity. She argues that the pre-Constantinian fathers of the Church adopted tropes in which "the father is both tropheus and trophe -- both feeder and food, breast and milk" (55). Here, Isabel seems instinctively to be reclaiming a symbol of feminine beneficence and wisdom which had been purloined "for the enhancement of male "wholeness"" (56).¹

The negative sexual experiences of Isabel's adult life, in which her body appears to have betrayed her, challenge the sense of awe she had felt at puberty when her body had seemed to possess a mystical power as she watched her first "menstrual blood, spinning out from between [her] legs like a spirit" (111). In using this "fluid sexual imagery," as Catherine Keller calls it (57), Isabel seems to challenge the notion that God's word is the property of the male and is therefore dispensed only through "that pale male fluid" (Keller 56), the seminal Word. The language she uses to describe her earlier experience voices, albeit unconsciously, what Catherine Keller suggests may be at the heart of modern Christian feminism: "an inchoate yearning for freedom from the socio-spiritual constrictions of mainline classical gender constructions" (56). Gordon evokes a sense of the mystery and spirituality inherent in the female cycle that challenges the ancient notion that menstruation and childbirth are somehow events from which women require cleansing. Juxtaposed with this sense of the intrinsic goodness of female flesh, however, is the pain and indignity Isabel experiences when she has an inter-uterine contraceptive device fitted. This pain threatens to thwart Isabel's attempts to celebrate as good and wholesome the pleasures of the flesh. For a woman with a Catholic heritage, the pain associated with reproductive process is frequently understood to be the consequences of sin rather than the price to be paid for sexual liberation.

The death of her father releases Isabel from the penance for her sin -- the forfeiture of her youth -- and from the unspoken prophecy of her father, that "no man would ever enter [her] life in any but a professional capacity," and that she "would remain intact" (22). Following her father's funeral, Isabel buys new and becoming clothes and has herself fitted with a contraceptive device since, as she calmly tells Eleanor, she had "liked" sleeping with her father's pupil, David, and she wants to go to bed with someone again soon (54). Isabel had "borne the imprint of [her father's] body all her life" (7), and his death and the burial of his body seem more than anything to permit the resurrection of Isabel's own body. For Isabel, freedom is predominantly a sexual concept. At the centre of her reborn self is a strong
sexuality that she had repressed while her father lived.

As Isabel sets out to re-create herself, she considers that she is both wise and courageous to have equipped herself for responsible sexual activity by eliminating the complications which fertility brings. She has yet to learn that sex will bring complications to her new life of which her previous cloistered existence can provide no warning. Both her friends attempt to disabuse Isabel of her eager expectation that a sexual relationship represents the best route out of her past. Eleanor remarks that "sex is so self-interested," and Liz's marital experience, which she relates to Isabel, has certainly taught her the truth of this assertion. Liz's relationship with her unfaithful husband, whom she describes as "a six-foot walking penis with a social conscience," has soured her responses to the male sex. Her lesbian lover, Erica, "has all those kinds of -- for lack of a better word -- male qualities that [she] admired, and that loneliness that men never have." However, despite her friends' cautionary tales, Isabel remains determined to re-experience the sensual pleasures to which her relationship with her father's pupil had so long ago introduced her.

Despite her courage, intelligence, and beauty, the rapidity with which Isabel's "advantages" conspire to bring unhappiness into her new life confirms Isabel in her belief that freedom comes with a hefty price tag. In Carol Iannone's ironic estimation, "Isabel eagerly plunges into the indulgences of the flesh. She sells her house and acquires an I.U.D., then takes an apartment (outside of Catholic Queens), and a couple of lovers (both married, one to a best friend); thirty years of Irish Catholic repression have obviously failed to dim her capacity for the sensual and the sexual". Isabel is the fictional embodiment of Gordon's view that, despite their risks, sensuality and sexuality are central to the way in which women confront life. At the start of Isabel's new life, she embraces the notion that if "the flesh" is the consigned domain of the female, she will celebrate it rather than carry it through life like a shameful burden. She sets out to enjoy the sensual pleasures of which her voluptuous body is clearly intended to be a visible sign. As her friend, Eleanor, tells her, Isabel "ought to have
hundreds of lovers" because she is "born for it" (79). On leaving the grey world of her father's sick room, Isabel revels sensuously in the colours of her new clothes, the texture of fresh fruits, and the soft curves of her own smooth body. Her narrative of the events that lead up to and follow after her father's death is a celebration in prose of the simple delights of the senses. Like Anne Redmon, Gordon uses food and feeding as a metaphor for the sexual appetite. Those pleasures that involve the participation of a partner for their enjoyment, however, are not so simple.

Since both Isabel's sexual partners are married men, Gordon has stacked the deck somewhat in favour of a tragic outcome to Isabel's sexual adventures. Her first lover, the libidinous John, husband of her friend Liz, has no interest in Isabel's mind. Like Mark's lust for Clare in David Lodge's novel *The Picturegoers*, John's interest in Isabel is focused upon her "promising" figure, her supposed innocence, and the chance to "pop [her] cherry" (142). If Isabel had expected to embark upon her sexual career with a partner who would celebrate with her the liberation of her starved flesh, she is rudely disabused of this hope. To John, she is a collection of stimulating body parts, her breasts "just the way [he] liked them, big and firm" (141). John is interested in Isabel only as far as her body provides for his sexual gratification. For him, sex is a matter of self-interest rather than of relationship.

Isabel's second lover has fallen out of love with the woman who is both his wife and the mother of his two children. Although Isabel is the most recent of a string of women with whom Hugh Slade has had extra-marital affairs, she will perhaps be the last since he does seem to be sincerely in love with her. Isabel embarks upon an affair with Hugh, knowing that the relationship will necessarily involve frequent separations since he has a wife and children to go home to. However, having slept with the husband of her best friend and embarked upon a sexual relationship with a married man, Isabel is honest enough to recognize that her behaviour during the two weeks following her father's funeral has been reprehensible. Rather than exercising her sexual freedom within a moral framework of her own construction, Isabel
has slipped into an irresponsible sexual abandon for which her lack of experience can only be partly blamed. She is too beguiled by the promise of her newly discovered sexual freedom, however, to foresee the pain and suffering, both to herself and to others, which her sexual abandon will bring.

Looking back upon her affair after her encounter with Hugh's wife, Isabel ruefully reflects that the Catholic saints had been right to be wary of sexual pleasure, knowing as they did what it could lead to. She decides that giving in to sexual temptation amounts to "putting yourself in the centre of the universe, your own body blocking the vision of God like an eclipse" (250). As she had responded to Hugh's advances, however, she had ignored all risk in her eagerness to experience all she had missed in the years with her father: "I was thinking, I don't want my body to be pure. I want red meat and liquor and cakes made with cream and butter. I was thinking, What I want is Hugh; what I want is pleasure. My body wanted to be warmed and filled and rested" (169). Isabel's is a rude awakening which results in a period of profound unhappiness from which she re-emerges "sadder and wiser" in the ways of the secular world.

Part of the problem for Isabel is her determination to construct her own life in opposition to the fate that she believes often overtakes women like herself. In the early days of her emancipation, Isabel denies the role of choice in the lives of women, particularly in the lives of women who remain faithful to the roles prescribed for them by the Church. She argues that there is a fated inevitability in Catholic women's lives that she is determined to avoid: "One was born and certain things happened and one responded. Cause and chance and the slow, inexorable accretion of events, and one looked to the past, to people who had lived through the same kinds of events for the outcome" (47). Having spent the years of her youth in caring for her father, Isabel is determined to leave behind Catholic notions of self-denial and obedience since "charity is tedious, and sacrifice is not, as Christ deceived us into thinking, anything so dramatic as crucifixion. Most of the time it is profoundly boring" (47).
Isabel's experiment with freedom in the form of an affair with Hugh Slade results in a public denunciation of her selfishness by Hugh's wife. As Isabel recoils with shock from Cynthia's accusations, she responds instinctively according to the tenets of her long abandoned faith. The thin veneer of her confidence in her right to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, free from moral censure, cracks at the moment of crisis and Isabel falls prey to doubts that have their origins in the Catholic values and judgements of her former life. In her denunciation of Isabel's selfishness in taking away her husband, Hugh's wife articulates what Isabel's suppressed Catholic conscience had suspected all along. Cynthia's verbal attack scores a direct hit upon Isabel's weakest point: her not quite abandoned Catholic sense of sexual sin. She points out a correlation between what she sees as Isabel's perverse sexuality and her Catholic upbringing. She tells Isabel:

I know all about girls like you. You and your friend Mrs. Ryan. Catholic girls with holy pictures of virgin martyrs. They make perverts out of you, don't they? Your friend Mrs. Ryan is a filthy pervert and you're just as bad. You couldn't wait for your father to die so you could get a man between your legs. There's something wrong with you. There's something disgusting and unhealthy. People like you aren't fit for normal life. (240-1)

Cynthia's diatribe has the force of a judgement by Isabel's own conscience. Her own reawakened Catholic conscience together with the terrible knowledge that both her father and Margaret would agree without reservation with Cynthia's interpretation of her motives, renders Isabel unable to resist the destructive logic of Cynthia's character assassination.

In her confusion, Isabel resolves to resurrect the person she had been in the eyes of all who knew her during the years of her father's illness, the "honest-to-God saint" (46). Her passion for Hugh and her determination to make up for her lost youth, she now sees, had blinded her to the selfishness of her love. She "had tried to live like a pagan" (242) and had lost her good name in the process. Guilt and panic precipitate in Isabel a swing back to the values of her father. Rather than analyzing her situation in a calm and logical manner, in her panic, Isabel resolves to give up Hugh and her new life since, taking what one wants involves
"hurting people" such as Cynthia, just as her selfish desires had once hurt Margaret and deprived her of happiness. She decides to return to a life of service, a life devoted to the care of Margaret, since "[her] body had caused [her] nothing but trouble: wanting David Lowe, wanting John Ryan, wanting Hugh. There was a long trail of grief beginning with [her] father's illness and stretching to Hugh's wife pointing her finger an inch away from [her] face" (248). Isabel blames her body rather than her poor choices for the problems she has encountered. She resolves to deny its needs, to destroy its "advantages" by ruining its beauty, and to employ its energies in the interests of Margaret's well-being.

Isabel's resolve to "take care of Margaret . . . the person [she is] least capable of loving" (249) tests the limits of the Catholic notion of charity. Life in the secular world has proved treacherous in its complexity and Isabel looks for refuge in a return to the simple life she had known before. Taking care of the unlovable Margaret will be "a pure act" through which she will become again "above reproach" (249). Isabel's charity, however, is no match for Margaret's hatred and bitterness. Isabel's attempts at kindness are consistently rebuffed as she attempts to bridge the gulf that her earlier cruelty had opened between them. She accepts Margaret's constant criticism and rejection of her as further penance for her sin while attempting to render her own body as unattractive as Margaret's by over-eating and inactivity. Loving had led her to hurt others, and by rendering her body unlovable she believes that she can "stop doing damage" (279) to others.

Isabel's attempts to be of service to Margaret as she had been to her father fail, she eventually realizes, because her motive has been based upon duty and upon her need to escape the dangers of life in the outside world rather than upon love. Having recognized that "such clever thefts" as the one she had perpetrated upon Margaret "are not, cannot be, permanently unpunishable" (25), and having failed to appease Margaret by her service, Isabel attempts to atone for her crime by means which Margaret will not resent or reject. After receiving reassurance from Hugh, in the form of a letter, that he will continue to wait for her,
Isabel finds the courage to admit that her promise to care for Margaret had been an extreme response to the chaos that her sexual behaviour had caused.

Recognizing that her own unhappiness and Hugh's will not assuage the pain they have caused others, Isabel decides upon another means of making Margaret's life "bearable" and of making the "final payments" due for her childhood treachery, her own "unfair advantages" and Margaret's lack of them. She gives Margaret the proceeds from the sale of her father's house so that she can live comfortably in her old age. Then, choosing "life," and accepting the "loss" inevitably entailed in trying to have everything -- "love, work, friends" (305), Isabel returns to the friends whose love, for Isabel, and perhaps too for Mary Gordon, is evidence of God's grace in the world. The love of her friends seems to represent Christ's love for humankind since they "had stood by [her] in a miracle of love when [she] had ceased to love them" (303). With this realization, Isabel is able to forgive herself and heal the hate she had conceived for her body when it had betrayed her into causing others pain and had invited the condemnation of Hugh's wife. She is able to reject polarized views of the body which at her father's death led her to focus upon sex as the acme of personal freedom only to reject her body and to punish it when it brought her censure. Isabel is able to recognize that like all human gifts, sexuality is neither good nor shameful in and of itself, but is subject to use and misuse according to the will of its owner. She reflects: "Christ had suffered in the body, and I too had a body. I knew it false but capable of astonishing pleasures. . . . but it was not death I wanted. It was life, and the body, which had been given to me for my pleasure, and the love of those whom loving was a pleasure" (303-4). Thus, Isabel re-enters the secular world with a more realistic vision of its pleasures and pitfalls. One important meaning of Christ's incarnation for Isabel is that the God's love is transmitted in the physical pleasure shared in acts of love. Having made this discovery, Isabel no longer carries her sexuality as a burden of shame symbolized by the abundance of flesh she has assumed during her stay with Margaret. She is ready to accept and celebrate the pleasure her body gives and receives. With the
"burden of flesh" lifted from her shoulders, she feels "weightless" as she leaves Margaret's house to return to "life" with her friends.

In her second novel, The Company of Women, Mary Gordon continues to explore the central theme of her first, that of the problems faced by a Catholic woman emerging from the shelter of the Catholic enclave -- but in the character of a very different woman. The narrative begins with the childhood of her heroine, Felicitas Taylor, who grows up in the care of her widowed mother, Charlotte, and a diverse and close-knit group of women who have in common the fact that their lives are centred upon a Catholic priest, Father Cyprian. When Felicitas enters college, she leaves the parochial shelter of the close-knit group of women and the priest who has been chiefly responsible for the formation of her character for a world with very different values from the one she has left behind. In her new environment, however, modern America is as despised as it was in the home in which Cyprian's ideas held sway. What Cyprian calls "this stinking age" (81), Felicitas' professor and lover, Robert, calls "this fucked-up age" (113).

Felicitas' professor, Robert Cavendish, is both fascinated and challenged by Felicitas' naiveté. Given the widespread promiscuity and "let it all hang out" atmosphere of the late 1970s, the thought of undertaking the sentimental education of a bright young woman, newly emerged from the protected environment of an orthodox Catholic home, is irresistible to a man as dogmatic and egotistic as Robert. In Felicitas' eyes, however, he is, as "extraordinary" as Cyprian had been, and most amazingly, he recognizes Felicitas as extraordinary, just as Cyprian and his female followers had done. Felicitas is easily taken in. She is not sophisticated enough to recognize that while Cyprian's dogmatism had been generated largely by his desire to help her fulfil herself and avoid the disappointments which his life had brought him, Robert is motivated solely by a selfish appetite for self-aggrandizement. When Felicitas falls in love with him, he loses interest in her. She responds to his suggestion that she sleep with other men in order to lessen her annoying attachment to
him by re-evaluating her own values so that they accord with his. She rationalizes that "perhaps there [is] nothing very radical or very significant about sex" (200), and if Robert needs to sleep with other women as well as herself, then the fault is in her. She is inferior to so great a man, just as she had been inferior to Cyprian, who had been "chosen, by God and anointed" as "no woman could be" (35). Felicitas had believed herself to be special only in as much as she had followed Cyprian's authority. Robert was also "extraordinary," and she was special in having been chosen by him. Although Robert "require[s] many women to fulfil his many sides," she decides that "the partial attentions of Robert [are] far more valuable than the dull attentions of an ordinary man" (200).

The result of Felicitas' efforts to please her lover by having sex not only with him but with one of the "guys downstairs" is the conception of "a child whose father [is] unknown" (217). As in Final Payments, it is the friendship of a woman, this time a "rival in love," which provides the graces of comfort and help in a time of trouble. Robert's discarded lover, Iris, helps Felicitas to arrange for an abortion of the child whose birth Felicitas is sure would prove to Cyprian and the women who loved her that "she had betrayed them all" (216). Gordon's grim depiction of an abortion clinic in the days when the termination of a pregnancy was still illegal is expressive of her pro-choice stance on the abortion issue. The sight of a woman leaving the abortionist's office trailing blood reminds Felicitas that she is risking her life in order not to disappoint those who love her. In this "moment of truth" in which Felicitas imagines herself "dying in the back of a movie theater" (235) after her abortion, she decides to trust in the constancy of the love of her mother, Cyprian, and the "company of women," and in their willingness to forgive her for her betrayal of the principles upon which they have built their lives. She returns home to bring up her daughter among the women who had nurtured her. Eventually, she decides to marry Leo Byrne, a local hardware store proprietor, who is a "good and ordinary man" (261). Thus, a sadder and wiser Felicitas decides that an ordinary life with an ordinary man is less than she had hoped for for herself, but infinitely safer for her daughter.
Felicitas has learned that "adoration is addictive" and "it is also corrupting" (257). It had encouraged Cyprian's fanaticism, made Felicitas herself arrogant and headstrong, and fed Robert's selfishness. Felicitas' plans for her daughter a simple childhood unburdened by the "thick deposit of . . . disappointed hopes" (257) which had been her own inheritance.

Like Isabel, whose father had imbued her with a sense of her responsibility to carry forward his traditional interpretation of Catholicism, Felicitas grows up with the awareness that, in this time of crisis for the Catholic Church, the traditionalist, Cyprian, and his band of female followers, have invested in her their hopes for the future of the faith. Both Isabel and Felicitas are groomed for their future roles as staunch Catholics in an increasingly ungodly world. Both are raised under the auspices of a rigidly orthodox father figure -- in Felicitas' case, Father Cyprian, a disillusioned priest who provides spiritual support in return for the women's solicitous care of his physical needs.

Isabel's reminiscences of her childhood make it clear that her father fondly encouraged her both in her sense of her own intellectual superiority and in her contempt for the "damp, immigrant pieties" practised by Margaret. Similarly, Felicitas has been raised by the company of women, led by Father Cyprian, to see herself as "an extraordinary soul" (71) who will, as a result of his vigilance, "embody" the reactionary and austere Catholicism which he and his small group of female followers "stand for in the world when [he and they] are dead" (70). However, as Felicitas leaves the security of their Catholic enclave for the secular world, she does so with few of the physical advantages for which Isabel finally has to pay. Having explored the fate of a beautiful and highly sensual woman who leaves the shelter of an orthodox Catholic home equipped only with a meagre knowledge of the world and a sense of her own superiority, Gordon turns her sights, in The Company of Women, to a young woman of similar background but with a plain face and an unremarkable figure. Indeed, had they met, Isabel might conceivably have dismissed Felicitas as one of life's "losers." Any feminine softness which might have developed in Felicitas is thwarted by Cyprian's open contempt of
any trait that smacks of the feminine. She is groomed to become "the kind of person who could lead an army" (72), a Saint Joan to Isabel's Mary, with a "straight spine, no waist," and "a hard tight body that would not bend for man or company" (72).

Felicitas arrives at college with lofty ambitions and a strong sense of her ability to fulfill them. As "the chosen one," her mission is to "make straight the way of the Lord" in a world whose values she has been taught to despise. According to Cyprian's vision, Catholic orthodoxy is represented by all that is masculine, while the opposite of orthodoxy is womanishness. Thus, Felicitas has been raised to despise and suppress those traits that Cyprian equates with "womanishness." Under the designation "womanish," Cyprian places practices and tendencies that he deems unorthodox and therefore despises. At the head of the list, Cyprian places the love of nature, which he sees as a trap which "could make you love the world" (44), followed closely by the "sentimental claptrap" of popular religion. According to Cyprian,

[one] must not be womanish. It was womanish to say, "How sweet the grasses are." It was womanish to say the rosary during mass. It was womanish to carry pastel holy cards and stitched novena booklets bound with rubber bands. It was womanish to believe in happiness on earth, to be a Democrat, to care to be spoken to in particular tone of voice, to dislike curses, whisky and the smell of sweat. Vigil lights were womanish and spiritual chain letters, the Catholic Digest, the Sacred Heart Messenger, statues of the Infant of Prague that could be dressed in different colors for the different liturgical seasons. (44)

Conversely, Cyprian impresses upon the young Felicitas the value of practices and preferences which, simply because he favours them, fall into the category of orthodoxy and are, therefore, "the opposite of womanish" (44):

The Passion of Christ was orthodox, the rosary said in private (it was most orthodox to prefer the sorrowful mysteries), the Stations of the Cross, devotion to the Holy Ghost, responding to the mass in Latin, litanies of the Blessed Virgin and the saints. Tower of ivory, house of gold, Ark of the Covenant, gate of heaven, morning star. To love these words was to know God. To love the smell of grasses was to be in error. (44)

Like Isabel's father, Professor Moore, Cyprian has been encouraged by his adoring circle of supporters to view his own prejudices and preferences as objective truths. Under his
influence, Felicitas is conditioned to despise the feminine since "womanishness" is the opposite of orthodoxy (44). Felicitas must, therefore, mortify her feminine flesh and confine herself to the "world of the spirit," which is "cold and exalted" (75) and male.

The method Cyprian chooses with which to cure Felicitas of her "womanish" love of the natural world is both cruel and extreme. He takes her to the run-down farm of a neighbour and forces her face to within inches of the filth on the floor of the pigpen until she vomits. He reminds Felicitas that "pigs eat garbage, like the mind of modern man" (43), condemning out of hand the world outside his own narrow sphere of vision. According to Cyprian, Felicitas must turn away from the natural world, which "modern man mistakes for God" (36), since what counts is "the spirit that is life eternal, not the smell of grasses" (43). Although the jaundiced view of the physical world and of the feminine which is Cyprian's contribution to Felicitas' upbringing is challenged by the influence of Felicitas' mother, Charlotte, whose "buoyant flesh" seems "magic to Felicitas, clean and safe" (57), Felicitas obeys the priest. Despite her deep love for her mother, and the comfort and safety her mother's physical presence brings her, when Charlotte's will conflicts with Father Cyprian's, Felicitas obeys his will since he is both man and priest. Her mother's influence does not overcome the legacy in Felicitas of Cyprian's polarized view of the world until Felicitas' encounter with the secular world demonstrates with dire consequences the inadequacy of his vision. She finally sees that, rather than preparing her for her mission to conquer the world for orthodoxy, Cyprian has inadvertently encouraged in Felicitas the notions which make her most vulnerable to exploitation as she enters the mainstream of American life.

Felicitas enters university with a strong sense of having been chosen for a great mission. Whereas Isabel had placed her confidence in her physical beauty, Felicitas, who knows she is physically plain, believes that her keen intellect will mark her as extraordinary. Just as she had been Cyprian's and her mother's friends' hope for the future, Felicitas fantasizes that her professor, recognizing uniqueness, will "like her more than any other
student ...value her and tease her" and "weep at her graduation" (90). Her experience prompts her to seek in the secular world relationships based upon similar precepts to those that form the strong mutual attachment between herself and Father Cyprian, with disastrous results. In seeking a place in the world of academe and rebelling against what she begins to see as the narrow and parochial ideology of Cyprian and the isolated group of woman who have been moulded by him, Felicitas unconsciously applies to her new relationships the same values and attitudes toward the feminine that she had learned from him. She is as easily overawed by Robert Cavendish, her political science professor and self-appointed apostle of free love, as she had been by Cyprian because of his godlike and coveted maleness. The professor, however, has selfish motives in manipulating Felicitas' malleable young mind. His opportunistic sense quickly perceives her innocence and vulnerability. Thus, Felicitas' life on campus is a parallel world, a mirror image of her life within the orthodox Catholic enclave of Cyprian and his company of women. In the unfamiliar secular world, Felicitas unconsciously applies to her affair with Robert the same religious ideals, couched in the same religious imagery, which she had brought to her relationship with Cyprian and which had successfully captured his love.

The veneration that she had previously reserved for Cyprian Felicitas quickly transfers to Robert, setting the tone of their relationship as one of acolyte and sexual mentor. Felicitas tells Roberts that to be his lover would be "the greatest honour in the world," and that she plans to become the kind of woman that pleases him while accepting his views and attitudes as superior to those she had adhered to under Cyprian's tutelage. Robert has, superficially, much in common with Cyprian. Neither tolerates contradiction, both despise the modern world, both are dogmatically certain of the truth of their own beliefs and, most importantly, each expresses the conviction that Felicitas is capable of doing "something extraordinary" under his direction. However, Robert, unlike Cyprian, promises to liberate Felicitas' emotions while appreciating the "great shape" her mind is in. Robert's pledge to "bring [Felicitas] to life"
(115) provides no warning of Robert's egotism and pretentiousness since she is accustomed to the lofty pronouncements of Cyprian, which had been couched in biblical language. It seems natural for her to think of her social and sexual development in the same terminology in which she had discussed the progress of her soul with Cyprian.

Felicitas quickly decides that Robert embodies all that she has missed in life as an isolated child "surrounded by the love of no one under fifty" (57). Robert admires her, however, for what Cyprian had despised. "You're a very passionate little girl," he tells her, and to him she is a "fascinating" woman rather than the "extraordinary soul" she is to Cyprian. She lavishes upon Robert "a pure, new love, naked and uncoloured" (111), a love which encompasses the pleasures of the flesh which Cyprian had considered barriers to spiritual growth. As she had in her relationship with Cyprian, Felicitas experiences an inordinate sense of having been chosen by Robert, and she responds to his advances with a gratitude quite out of keeping with the prevailing atmosphere of sexual equality of the decade. Robert is quick to exploit Felicitas' sense of her own inadequacy and to use it to his own advantage. Felicitas is easily persuaded to move out of her mother's apartment into Robert's ménage of discarded lovers and to become one of the women who serve his domestic needs under the misguided impression that their lifestyle is evidence of their participation in the feminist movement.

In her portrayal of Robert's household, Gordon reveals her belief that in the so-called liberated sixties and seventies, women often exchanged one kind of domestic bondage for another in the mistaken view that they were achieving greater freedom. Just as Cyprian, in his traditional enclave, has a group of women to tend him, the sexual revolution has brought Robert a bevy of women to attend his needs rather than the traditional one "little woman" at home. Interestingly, the traditional Catholic novelist, Piers Paul Read, shares Gordon's view of the so-called emancipation of women in the late 1970s. In his fictional critique of American society during this era, entitled The Professor's Daughter, Read provides a similar portrayal of an intelligent young woman in rebellion against her traditional -- although not Catholic --
family, who becomes enslaved in an exploitative relationship even as she tries to free herself from her parent's "false" values. Read's Louisa falls prey to the selfish desires of a young man, much like Robert Cavendish, who sees in the liberal attitudes of the time an opportunity to embrace freedom while casting off responsibility for his actions.

The unusual domestic arrangements of Felicitas' childhood -- the close company of middle-aged women clustered around a disillusioned priest -- make it a simple matter for her to accept the living arrangements at Robert's flat. A girl brought up in a more conventional household might have questioned the presence of two other women whom she learns are his former girlfriends now "keeping house" for him. When Robert pontifically announces to the assembled pot-smokers sitting on the floor of his apartment that "something very important is going to happen to Felicitas" and that he hopes she will remember this night as "the most beautiful night of her life" (125-6), Felicitas is grateful to Robert for his kindness in relieving her of her virginity. She equates the event with her first communion, which she had been taught ought to be the happiest day of one's life. Her habit of thinking in religious terms leads her to hope she will prove worthy of Robert's choice of her, just as, as a young first communicant, she had hoped to please her priest and her God. After her rite of sexual passage, Felicitas thanks Robert for performing his priestly role in her sexual initiation, not noticing that his interest is in his performance rather than upon the significance of the occasion for her. She sees his sexual interest in her as one of generosity toward an unattractive woman, his lovemaking as an act of charity. Since "she ha[s] no beauty" to arouse a man's sexual interest, she expects only to be admired for her fine mind. During Felicitas' adolescence, Felicitas' mother "had thought the only kind thing to do was to keep attention from her daughter's fleshy nature, not to raise false hopes" (130). The effects of this training are to induce in Felicitas a sense of "the honor . . . of Robert's love, the perfect gift of it, the bestowed treasure, the pure act of grace" (130 my emphasis).

Having been encouraged to value the masculine above the feminine and therefore to
acknowledge the superiority of Cyprian, as a man, over the women who looked to him for
spiritual guidance, Felicitas conceives her relationship with Robert as one based on the "duty"
and obeisance owed by an inferior to a superior. The theological framework in which she has
been raised provides a perfect template for this new relationship. Felicitas is as ready to
worship at the feet of Robert as she was to defer to Cyprian's superior male views. It does not
surprise her that

she would want [Robert] more than he wanted her. It seemed to her natural. It was as
easy to accept as any other natural fact, like gravity or the heat of the sun. One lived
with such facts. One might be interested in their causes, but it was folly to pretend that
one could do anything but bend to them. Robert, being who he was, was infinitely
more desirable than she. It was not just his beauty, although everything followed from
that. It was the way he took on life, the way he was desired. . . . Part of his majesty
was that he was a man, with a man's bodily strength, never having had to question the
propriety of his inheritance. No woman could be as sure as he, as simple. (133)

Cyprian has conditioned Felicitas to accept the superiority of the male not only as a theological
concept but also as an unquestionable tenet of natural law.

Robert's interest in Felicitas is self-serving rather than charitable. Like Mark in Lodge's
novel *The Picturegoers*, Robert is attracted to women whose sexual innocence provides a
sense of conquest. As Felicitas overhears someone say, she is "one of Robert's rescuees."
She is the lucky recipient of Robert's charity, manifest in his priestly acts of "mercy fucking"
(140). Although hurt by this comment overheard in Robert's apartment, Felicitas accepts the
truth and rightness of its content. Her Catholic upbringing has accustomed her to the idea of
the separation of body and spirit, and she does not realise that a fine mind can generate
sexual passion as easily as physical beauty. Just as Isabel, in Gordon's *Final Payments*, had
been conditioned to expect her beauty to generate love rather than lust, Felicitas cannot
imagine that her character might evoke sexual desire. Because this deprecating view of
herself distorts Felicitas' judgement, causing her to be grateful for Robert's attentions, she
believes it to be her responsibility to hold Robert's interest in her rather than seeing that his
jaded sexuality requires the constant stimulation of new partners. She fails to see that his
ménage of women is less a sign of his liberated attitude than his need to move from one
woman to the next with a rapidity that signifies a shallow, selfish nature and an inability to
make a commitment. Sitting in a circle with Robert and his discarded partners, Iris and Sally,
Felicitas does not resent her role as merely the current sexual interest in Robert's life. Rather,
she visualizes their group in terms of the mystical body of Christ, each of its members having
a role to play in the furthering of Robert's kingdom.

Robert is quick to exploit the theological bent of Felicitas' conception of male/female
relationships. His insistence that Felicitas "be willing to sacrifice [her family] for a principle"
(153) is calculated to evoke in her mind Jesus warning, that "he that loveth father or mother
more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 2:37), the principle Robert has in mind being
Felicitas' availability to him while he wants her company. Thus, Felicitas quickly decides that
she must "leave her mother's house," take up her cross, and follow Robert. When Felicitas
betrays Cyprian and the company of women by ridiculing their values and aspirations before
her new friends, she views her behaviour in terms of Peter's denial of Christ before his
crucifixion. Then, appalled by her treachery, she plunges "with the automatic reflex of the
absolutist" (155) toward the opposite extreme in order to win the approval of Robert and his
company of discarded lovers.

While Robert enjoys in theory the idea that he is graciously providing Felicitas' sexual
education, her willingness to please him and her air of waiting for her devotion to evoke a
response of love from him give Robert an uncomfortable sense of obligation toward her. He
attributes this feeling not to his desire to escape commitment but to Felicitas' inability to
discard the redundant values of her conventional past, the "conditioning, the "whole fucking
gestalt" that she "trails" behind her. When Robert suggests that their monogamy is the
problem and that to solve it she "should be fucking other people" (195), Felicitas decides that
if allowing someone else to "have her" will make Robert happy, she will make the sacrifice.
Clearly the Catholic ideal of sacrificial love has become distorted in Felicitas muddled mind so
that it has become the notion that she must sacrifice her own values for those of her beloved, whatever the cost to herself. Thus, Felicitas decides to "try not to mind his having other women. She understood that she was neither good nor wise nor beautiful enough to satisfy him. Robert was extraordinary; he required many women to fulfil his many sides" (200), just as Cyprian had been extraordinary and had required the devotion of a whole group of women to satisfy his sense of the veracity and importance of his views.

Felicitas' awakening comes when Sally, one of Robert's ex-lovers, explains to her both Robert's modus operandi and the hold he has over herself. The situation at Robert's apartment is not, as Felicitas had thought, the result of liberal views on sexual equality but is based upon each woman's hope that Robert will some day reciprocate the love she bears him. Sally maintains the fiction of her independence because she knows that Robert will reject her if she asks for his commitment, despite the fact that he has fathered her child. "He is very easily bored," she tells Felicitas, and "the only way to keep him [is] to keep going away" (206).

Thus, all of Robert's women are as enslaved as the married women they purport to despise for their dependence upon their husbands. Their liberation is a fiction in which freedom is bought at the price of integrity and self-respect. Felicitas' spiritual yearning, fed by Cyprian, to be not merely loved but to be "utterly absorbed" leads her to abandon the Catholic moral framework which has previously governed her life and to espouse one in which she has less freedom and dignity.

Felicitas realizes too late that Robert will be satisfied with nothing less than her willingness to have sex with him when he wants it and without any commitment on his part to their relationship. She finds herself pregnant and unable to tell which of her lovers is the child's father: Robert, or Richard, the "unbeautiful" young student who lived downstairs and with whom she had chosen to act out Robert's instruction to have sex with other people. The pregnant Felicitas' experience at an abortion clinic, the sad parade of unfortunate women, summonses a vision of "all the dead women, hacked and bled," whose "eyes closed in a
violent death because they preferred to die rather than to give birth" (234). Felicitas
remembers, as she awaits her turn with the abortionist, that she need not risk her life in this
way since she has people in her life whose love of her involves a sense of commitment which
will not allow them to abandon her in her extremity. She returns home, a prodigal daughter, to
those who have longed for her return. As in Final Payments, it is the love of friends which
redeems those who have lost their moral way, and which most closely embodies the
characteristics of grace. If grace has a place in Gordon's theodicy, it is in the capacity of
friends to love and to forgive.

The final chapter of The Company of Women is composed of monologues by the
women who comprise the company which surrounds Cyprian, and a passage by Cyprian
himself. Each member of the company looks back upon the events that the novel covers in an
attempt to make sense of them. Felicitas (not altogether successfully) justifies her choice of
an ox-like man for her husband, arguing that her daughter, Linda, has a right to a "normal"
childhood and that the ordinariness of Leo Byrne will keep Linda safe from an exploitative
outside world. Felicitas wants to protect her daughter from the expectations of those who
would make her feel "special," burdening her with obligations that will make her "fear the
consequences of [her] ordinary actions" (241). Cyprian's persuasive rhetoric together with her
isolation from the secular world has been responsible for much of Felicitas' pain and she is
determined to save her own child from succumbing to her own errors. Thus, she chooses
Leo's silence over Cyprian's hectoring. Cyprian's dogmatism, his narrow insistence upon
"three ideas: the authority of the Church, the corruption induced by Original Sin and the
wickedness of large-scale government" (264), she now realizes, were the result of an
inferiority of mind. She now sees that "it is so easy for men with the kind of mind Cyprian has
to make a women look foolish: the sage fire in whose flame must burn the fat female mind"
(264). To protect Linda from such influences and from developing a "taste for the fanatical" to
which she believes all fatherless girls are prone, Felicitas marries Leo, "a good and ordinary
man" (261). Through this choice, she forfeits the "fine texture" of her own life so that Linda will not go through life prey to the dangers of those who hope to be "chosen," or who succumb to "the fate of [becoming] the family hope" (257).

Unlike the sensuous Isabel of Final Payments, Felicitas is not, as a mature woman, over-burdened by the desires of her body. Her experience of Cyprian's polarized vision has made Felicitas wary of extremes. She cannot understand "random sexual desire" of the sort that lead Isabel into imprudent sexual liaisons. She chooses a median path in which the "exchange of sexual pleasure" is an antidote for the hatred of the body to which Cyprian's polarized views of flesh and spirit lead. Felicitas hopes that sexual love will help mellow her own tendency to intolerance, and restrain her "growing cruelty of judgement" (260). Like David Lodge, Gordon clearly believes that sexuality plays a part in the development of virtues such as generosity and tolerance. Felicitas reflects: Cyprian had "fathered me as if we were both bodiless, for our connection had nothing in it of the flesh" (260). Her upbringing had led Felicitas to despise the feminine and her own "muffling, consoling flesh" (284). She chooses to marry Leo so that Linda will be fathered in a way that marks her as "an ordinary child...of flesh and bone," and she knows that this necessitates her entering into a relationship with him that is not merely companionable, but which includes the sharing of a physical intimacy that will make her more human. Felicitas has learned, as Cyprian finally acknowledges, that "Christ took on flesh for love, because the flesh is loveable" (285) and she knows that in order for Linda to accept her own body and its desires, she must be given the living example of her parents' physical love for each other.

Implicit in Felicitas' decision to marry Leo is the sense that, for her, marriage is a sacrifice she is willing to make for the sake of her daughter, and that to embark upon a relationship with a man is always a choice for safety over independence. Until the last moment, Felicitas is unsure whether she is accepting Leo's marriage proposal in order to provide her child with a father so that she will have an "ordinary" childhood, or whether she is
looking for "shelter" for herself, a refuge that the Church, in the figure of Cyprian, had previously provided. Presumably she chooses the silent and docile Leo because he will make the fewest claims upon her independence of mind. Felicitas has been conditioned to view marriage less as a union in which the individual gifts of each partner are pooled for the benefit of both than as a contract in which the wife submits to the husband in exchange for the shelter which only a man can provide. Felicitas' acceptance of Leo's proposal is an admission of need, and she views it as a failure in self-sufficiency which she has at least minimized by accepting a man whose gifts, apart from mere male strength, are inferior to her own. It is the feminine need to maintain personal autonomy in relationships with men that is the topic to which Gordon turns in her latest novel, *Spending*.

In *Spending*, Gordon's argument with Catholicism is as pronounced as it is in the works discussed above, and what Ross Labrie has called Gordon's "attenuated" position as a Catholic writer (*English Studies in Canada* 167) becomes even more attenuated. Her focus, in *Final Payments* and *The Company of Women*, had been the compromises confronting two women whose Catholic childhood had isolated them from mainstream American society and its largely secular and relative values. As Sandy Asirvatharn puts it, "the less than perfect way people really live their lives, especially in contrast to the rigorous ideals espoused by the Catholic Church, has been Gordon's perennial concern" (51). In this same interview, Gordon provides a brief preview of *Spending* that shows how abrupt a departure in theme from her previous novels she intended to make. She says, "I'm doing a comic erotic novel about a female painter and a man who says to her: I'll give you everything you need to make great art -- time, space, money, and sex. It's a kind of utopian look at sexual life" (60). In the published novel, the vigorous and varied sex life of her heroine is indeed described at great length, presumably to emphasize its positive effect upon her creativity. However by the time *Spending* was completed, the novel's main focus had become, as E.M. Broner points out in her review, the tension between a woman painter's need for autonomy and the benefits
offered by a male patron (25). Unlike Isabel and Felicitas, who struggle to throw off the
"rigorous ideals" and expectations of the Catholic Church, the heroine of Spending has
ostensibly discarded the moral values of her Catholic upbringing. Instead, Monica Szabo,
Gordon's painter heroine, confronts what she perceives to be the expectations of secular
society (rather than those of the Catholic sub-culture), particularly as they pertain to female
artists, although her Catholic heritage returns to haunt her in the form of an accusation of
blasphemy in her paintings from the Catholic Defense League.

The novel, narrated by Monica herself, begins with a slide show at which Monica
laments the unfair advantages that male artists have over their female counterparts. She tells
her audience:

You know folks, there's a tradition that male painters get to take advantage of: the
woman who's a combination model, housekeeper, cook, secretary. And of course she
earns money. And provides inspiration. All over the world, girls are growing up
dreaming of being the Muse for some kind of artist. Looking at their bodies in mirrors
thinking, "Maybe some man would like to paint that." Reading French cookbooks that
tell them how to make really succulent little dishes out of horsemeat with a lot of bay
leaves and wine. Preparing physically and spiritually to carry his canvases to a hard­
hearted gallery owner, their muscles straining, their eyes brimming with unshed tears.
Now I ask you, mothers and fathers of America, are your boys dreaming of these
things? Where, I ask you, lovers of the arts, where are the male muses? (16)

Dramatically, a man in the audience, who turns out to be extremely rich, stands up and
volunteers for the job. In the ensuing pages of the novel Gordon waves her literary wand to
produce a fairy-tale world in which Monica is able to enjoy the benefits traditionally enjoyed by
male artists.

After much soul searching, Monica accepts her would-be muse's offer of financial
support. Within the three year period which the novel covers, Monica progresses under B's
patronage -- she refuses to divulge her patron's name until the last page of the narrative --
from being "a moderately successful painter" to "a very successful" one. Even the seeming
set-back of the Catholic Defense League's opposition to her pictures is turned to advantage,
however, since the publicity, which the subject matter of her paintings attracts, draws attention
to, and increases the popularity of, her controversial "spent men" paintings. Subsequently, when B loses all his money and can no longer "spend" (in both the monetary and sexual senses of the word), in keeping with Gordon's utopian design, Monica serendipitously receives the gift of an apartment worth two million dollars from an elderly benefactress to whom B has introduced her.

Using some of the money from Monica's fortuitous windfall, B is able to restore his fortunes through the stock market, and, as a result of Monica's patient wooing, his flagging libido is revived. Thus, Monica is able to return B's generosity, both in the form of money and in a reciprocal faith in his ability to succeed. The relationship that began on the shaky foundations of sexual attraction is clearly developing a firmer grounding, having been blessed and cemented by the mutual generosity, financial and sexual, of both partners. In true fairy tale fashion, Monica has both a handsome prince and a fairy godmother. However, despite its utopian tone, the couple does not live ecstatically ever after, but merely contentedly, in the customary fashion of Gordon's heroines. At the novel's end, Monica provides a sense that her relationship with B continues to thrive, but without protestations of love or formal ties. There is no fairy tale wedding with mutual promises of life-long love. Instead, as they lie in bed, about to make love, B merely remarks that "[they] have a good time together," which is "not so common these days", while Monica, equally prosaically, reflects that B's is the body of someone she knows well" (300). For Gordon, the achievement of "ordinary happiness" is the best that one can hope for. Indeed, according to Gordon, one ought only to cultivate an ordinary existence since, as she tells M. Deiter Keyishian, "an extreme life doesn't breed happiness" (73).

Although Gordon's focus has shifted further into the secular sphere in Spending, several of the old Catholic "bones of contention" with which Gordon has been concerned throughout her literary career are still very much in evidence. Monica has more worldly wisdom and greater self-confidence than either Isabel or Felicitas possess, but Gordon's
latest heroine is nevertheless still reacting against what Gordon perceives to be the Catholic
tendency to devalue the flesh. As in her previous novels, the characters in Spending fall
easily into the categories of winners and losers -- although Gordon's sense of regret is less
evident here than it was in Final Payments-- and the troublesome vestiges of a Catholic
childhood are evident in Monica's doubts about the morality of her choices, although they are
far less troublesome or inhibiting for her than they had been for Isabel and Felicitas. While
Monica clearly has both feet in the secular world, Gordon continues to explore alternatives to
Catholic notions of the nature of love and charity. In her created utopia, the "witches," who in
the form of housekeeper and ex-wife had threatened the happiness of her heroine, Isabel, in
Final Payments, have not been banished from the fairy kingdom. In the character of an ex-
nun from the Catholic Defense League who pickets the exhibition of her paintings, Gordon
depicts the prudish attitude toward sexuality that she believes extreme orthodoxy encourages.

Gordon characterizes her fictional "witch" as "the sort of on-paper impeccable woman who
can never be found in transgression and yet is an absolute killer" (Keyishian 72). Such
women, according to Gordon, adhere rigidly to the letter of the law while ignoring the
compassion inherent in its spirit. They have their prototype in Evelyn Waugh's Mrs. Muspratt,
in Brideshead Revisited, a woman whose rigidity in matters of moral law lead her to refuse to
sleep under the same roof as her adulterous sister-in-law, Julia. Lodge provides the male
counterpart of such figures in his religious bigot, Damien O'Brien, in The Picturegoers.
Monica, on the other hand, is representative of the expansiveness and adaptability of those
who are focused upon a celebration of the created world rather than a renunciation of its
pleasures in the interests of what she considers to be rigid and outdated rules.

Monica Szabo is the middle-aged and divorced mother of two grown up daughters.
She has mastered, long before her amazing stroke of luck and the events depicted in the
novel begin, the art of "stringless sex." She openly acknowledges at the outset that her story
is built upon a triad composed of money, sex, and art, and she is as confident and worldly-
wise as Isabel and Felicitas had been uncertain and naïve. Although she has had a Catholic upbringing, she seems to have had little difficulty discarding the sexual mores of her Catholic inheritance and, by and large, she is quite untroubled by the absolutist claims of Catholic moral law upon her conscience, especially when it comes to sexual activity. Unlike the two previous Gordon heroines discussed, Monica is unashamedly libidinous, crude, and fiercely independent. However, B's patronage and the fact that she is involved with him sexually, "muddy" the moral pool since the combination of money and sex is suggested. While Monica has had a number of affairs since her divorce, she is uncomfortable with the idea of becoming a "kept woman."

Monica is worried less about the loss of her freedom than she is about the "tincture of whoredom" which she believes inevitably attaches to a woman who accepts money from a man with whom she is having sex. While Monica is thoroughly at home with the notion that sexual relationships do not presuppose commitment from either partner, because money has been introduced into the equation, she is beset with doubts which take the form of her long discarded Catholic notions of morality. She is "liberated" enough to own quite candidly to her enjoyment of recreational sex, but is less certain of her moral ground when it comes the subtleties, which in this case are the traditional and stereotypical images of women who exchange sexual favours for money. In terms of the polarization of women between the categories of virgin and whore, Monica has been more successful in discarding the virgin ideal than in dealing with its opposite.

While deciding whether or not to accept the patronage B offers, Monica keeps "thinking about the word 'mistress,' and all the things that [go] along with it" (24). She muses upon the familial and social ostracism that acceptance of B's offer might involve, the shame associated with the word "whore." Furthermore, as a result of her polarized notions of women's roles, which Gordon seems to suggest are a vestige of her Catholic childhood, Monica reads into the word "mistress" the notion of lost independence, of having "no work.
No friends. No children. No travel. No connections to the larger world" (25). She wonders how old you have to be -- when I say you I mean, of course, girls -- before you learn the connection. That there is one, at least. I wonder how long the gap is between knowing that there's such a thing as sex and knowing that some people get paid to have it. And those are the people you don't want to be like. I wonder whether there has ever been a girl so numbed or blasé or abused that the first inkling of this knowledge doesn't make her feel sickened for what she shares with every woman. The potential to be a whore. Whore. The fixed pole representing whatever it is that isn't good. There's no similar fixed pole for men; no word that gets hissed out at a man on the street, hissed out between the closed lips of an enraged or disappointed lover, no single vessel for everything loathsome about his sex. It had never occurred to me that I might travel anywhere near the other pole. The bad one. If I'd rejected the madonna and the virgin, it was for something better, something self-invented, something that smashed icons and cast off old ties. (48-9)

When B points out that he might easily have deceived her by giving her money before making love to her, Monica is persuaded by his honesty and openness to accept his offer. However, her feminine suspicion both of B's motives and her residual "fear of being bought, of being paid for sex" (61), continue to haunt her while B's wealth allows her the freedom to concentrate her time and energy upon the series of paintings which will turn her, by the end of the tale, into a celebrated painter.

The opportunity to paint uninterrupted by the need to earn money or undertake domestic duties is compelling enough, however, to partially stifle the inner voices which suggest to Monica that B may be "collecting" her, collecting her "making of art," or collecting her "essence as an artist" (71). She determines to accept B's offer, but to suppress in herself any of the feminine tendencies she might have to feel grateful for B's largesse by adopting the attitudes which she considers a male painter would demonstrate toward his female muse or a "Renaissance painter" toward "his patron" (77). In this way, during her idyllic months of high artistic productivity interspersed with great sex and gourmet meals, Monica also suppresses her occasional misgivings about "[taking] money from a man" (13). "The Muse is there," she argues, "to serve the artist, not to be considered by her" (64-5).

Monica's persistence in treating B in the way in which she believes a male counterpart would behave is facilitated by his determination to serve her needs, both in the kitchen and in
the bedroom, and by his remaining unobtrusively in the background while she works. B's willingness to have his own aspirations take second place to Monica's needs and desires means that Monica's struggle to assume a dominant role, which is normally considered the prerogative of the male partner in a relationship, takes place within herself rather than in the cluttered arena of male/female battles for power. B's passivity frequently angers Monica because it forces her to recognise that she is engaged in a struggle with herself not to fall back into the feminine stereotype of submissiveness and gratitude, rather than against a dominating male partner. In her customary crude terms, she tells her lover: "You don't know what it's like to have to fight your impulses to be a bimbo or a domestic servant because the person you're sharing the bathroom with has a cock" (123). In her relationship with this "muse with the attributes of a prince charming" (Broner 25), Monica discovers that she is not quite as "liberated" as she had imagined in that she has held onto many of the notions of womanhood that she thought she had discarded, along with her bra, in the sixties.

Despite these notions, these half-buried relics of a conventional past, however, Monica is the ideal candidate for the role of heroine in a novel of utopian design. In her honesty, assertiveness, and independence, Monica is a far cry from the feminine stereotype that depicts women as needy and weak and as entering into sexual relationships in order to find love, financial security, and someone to shift the piano. Her guilt-free attitude toward her sexual relationships is a far cry from Lodge's characters' agonized conscience searching and, indeed, from the mixed feelings of her heroines, Isabel and Felicitas. Not only is Monica the quintessential liberated woman, her rapacious "no strings" attitude to sex is one that has been traditionally considered a characteristic of the male. Monica is proud of her active libido, and she laments the minor role sex typically plays in the lives of the middle-aged. She ruefully reflects that her idyllic sexual relationship cannot be discussed with her friends because it will be a source of envy:

This was something you couldn't talk to just anyone about. At this historic moment,
and at my age -- fifty -- having good sex or even the prospect of it is like having a lot of money and living among people who are barely getting by. Most people I know aren't having a lot of sex... A friend of mine, who looks like Gene Tierney, went for three years without having sex. It's never been that bad with me, but I've had long periods without sex and for seven years I haven't taken anyone I've slept with seriously. (49)

Unconsciously, perhaps, Monica talks of sex in terms of a currency of exchange because she is constantly in a state of uncertainty about her relationship with B since it involves an arrangement which might be construed by her friends as the exchange of money for sex. However, since Monica's view of life is firmly fixed upon the physical and material world, and her life is "no longer shaped by belief" (132), she is determined to ignore the growling of her conscience and take advantage of B's financial generosity.

The public demonstration of outrage by members of the Catholic Defense League which her hugely successful series of paintings entitled "Spent Men, After the Masters" (55) evokes, brings to the surface the latent sexual guilt that Monica sees as the legacy of a Catholic childhood. Monica reluctantly admits: "The first thing I felt when I heard that someone had accused me of blasphemy was guilt. When I was growing up, blasphemy was a big thing. I had a concept of the sacred and it never occurred to me, until accused, that I might be violating the sacred" (180). It appears as if Monica's residual guilt, which comes from having chosen a life-style at odds with her Catholic training, and her sense of culpability for living as a "kept woman," attaches itself, and gives weight to, the accusation that by uniting the sexual and the spiritual in her paintings she has appropriated a time-honoured and sacred image of Christianity -- Christ's body -- in order to mock those who revere it. Blasphemy had been "a big thing" (180) when Monica was growing up, but her adult vision of the sacred, which involves the melding of sexuality with spirituality, has never before been held up against the yardstick of her childhood notions of the sacred. The result of their meeting is a reflexive guilt, which Monica secularizes by converting it into utilitarian terms. She decides that in introducing the spectre of sex into her depictions of the dead Christ, "maybe [she] had
offended some really sincere and decent people" (181).

However, Monica's charitable response to the opposition to her paintings quickly gives way to a less generous attitude toward her detractors when she sees that the person "carrying the biggest sign" (181) is an old adversary from her high school days who has since become a nun. Alice Marie Cusalito, who had been Monica's "archenemy" at school, is another of Gordon's "witch" figures. Her physical unattractiveness, like Margaret Casey's in Final Payments, signals her role as one of Gordon's "losers" who have espoused a fervent practice of their religion as, in David Lodge's phrase, "the plain girl's substitute for sex" (The Picturegoers 51). For Gordon, lack of physical beauty and poor dress sense go in tandem with sanctimony, rosary "chanting" orthodoxy and the picketing of "blasphemous" art exhibitions. The beautiful Monica, however, does not need religion. She is not handicapped by huge feet, a "puddingy" face, frizzy hair, or a rigid faith, as Alice is. Monica is one of those fortunate enough to be loved and desired by others, men such as the rich and handsome B.

Monica's handsome lover, mentor, and muse, has made his millions in the futures market, a business of which Monica is ignorant and about which she disdainfully declines to enlighten herself. Monica is dedicated to and firmly focused upon her art. After all, she muses, being "nice" to B, by taking an interest in his work, for example, would spoil their relationship. Thus, when she begins to "feel grateful" to B, she thinks about all the male artists she has known who treated their wives badly. Monica quickly accustoms herself to the benefits B's patronage brings to her life. He not only provides the material necessities, thus freeing Monica from domestic distractions from her painting, he "spends" himself in a sexual relationship which focuses upon Monica's sexual needs, rather than upon his own, and which feeds and sustains Monica's creativity. Soon after Monica accepts B's offer, he becomes not only her benefactor and "Muse," but her model for her series of paintings entitled, "Spent Men, after the Masters," a "series of postorgasmic men based on the great Italian Renaissance portraits of dead Christs" (55). In these paintings Monica attempts to express her approach to
incarnation in a blend of the sexual and religious which links the most significant of all deaths, that of Jesus, with the "little death" of sexual consummation.

Monica is determined to maintain the original terms of her relationship with B. While she paints the man who is the object of her sexual desire, she constantly compares her own feelings toward her model and those that she imagines a male painter might feel toward his female model. Initially, Monica decides not to "pretend" a "distance" from her subject which she does not feel, yet when she begins to paint B, she quickly develops an objective attitude toward his body which unnerves B and makes him feel as if he were "some THING" rather than someone. Soon, Monica is able to say, as she assumes a male painter might say of his female model, he "posed, he was my creature" (168), and to berate him when he fails to perform his supporting role according to her wishes: "Do you know what I'd be allowed to do if I were one of those male painters? Do you know what you'd have to do? You'd be down at the precinct bailing me out of the clinker I'd gotten into when I punched out two cops in a drunken brawl. You'd be sitting with me in the doctor's office waiting for the results of my gonorrhoea test" (171). While part of the humour of the narrative comes from Monica's assumption of the behaviour traditionally expected of the "artistic" male -- the boorishness and the self-absorption -- the genre of fairy-tale provides a prototype for Monica as the spoiled princess who tyrannizes those dedicated to her service.

Since "the object of her attention is the visible world" (132) rather than the spiritual realm, Monica realizes that she must bring together art and faith by some other means. The ensuing narrative makes it clear that the publicly acclaimed series of paintings, which she produces during the three years of her relationship with B that the novel covers, is largely made possible by B's sexual and financial generosity. Rather than from spiritual sources, Monica's artistic energy seems to come from the gratification of her senses in the good food and "good sex" which B supplies in good measure, and from the love and support of friends. Thus, in this as in Gordon's previous novels, if grace were said to act at all upon the lives of
her characters, it comes less through the traditional official channels of the Church and her sacraments, than from generosity in the physical expression of love and in the love of friends for each other. As she recalls the deep spirituality of a nun who had taught her as a child, Monica realizes that the "perfect concentration" and "perfect self-forgetfulness" which had been achieved by Sister Imelda as a result of an intense prayer life, can only be possible for her through attention to "the visible world" (132) which is her natural focus as a painter. Monica does not view the physical world as inferior to the realm of the spirit. She sees the physical, including the pleasures of the senses, as a means of connecting with the life of the spirit rather than as a temptation to evil. Thus, in the character of Monica, Gordon argues against what she believes is the Catholic devaluation of the physical. For Gordon, sexuality does not exist in opposition to the spiritual but as a legitimate means of achieving a sense of the numinous in human life.

In true fairy tale style, Gordon's Spending has a happy ending in which the highly successful Monica prepares a sumptuous feast for her lover, family, and friends, who have contributed to her great success. As in Final Payments and The Company of Women, Gordon measures success in the currency of friendship. In this happy ending, Monica carefully collects the ingredients for the dishes she prepares with reverent care, as if she were preparing for a sacred rite, and presides over the celebration like a high priestess. She views the party and all its participants as part of her creation as an artist, taking credit not only for the work upon her canvases, but for the colourful creation of edible art upon the table, the assembly of guests, and the atmosphere of conviviality and friendship. As woman, artist, mother, lover, and friend, she claims the scene before her as her own creation, her gift the catalyst which brings the graces of love and community to all present.

Even more than her previous novels, Final Payments and the Company of Women, Gordon's "utopian divertimento", is informed by what Lucy Atkins calls Gordon's "old fashioned feminism" (9b). Monica throws herself into the "if you can't beat them, join them"
mode of feminism, attempting to "redress the balance" of power between men and women "by demanding the freedom to behave just like men" (9b). The result might have been disastrous had not Gordon written the novel as an amusing -- if a little wistful -- diversion which provides the "let-out" that "nobody gets hurt" by Monica's appropriation of the "male" prerogative of dogged self-indulgence. Only Gordon's wryly humorous treatment of her subject prevents her from handing the final bullet to critics such as Carol Iannone who consider that Gordon's books "are [really] about the monumental self-centredness released by the collapse of orthodoxy" (66). Yet, in demanding what she needs to sustain her as she paints her masterpieces, Monica is not completely selfish. At the end of her narrative, she shows a clear appreciation of the contribution that her lover, family, and friends, have made to her success. She take a holistic approach that implies that as a result of taking care of her own needs, she has more to give back to her loved ones.

In the fiction of Mary Gordon, the task of providing a mainstream or secular moral vision of a given situation in contrast to that of her Catholic and ex-Catholic heroines is often invested in the male characters. In Final Payments, for example, Liz's lover, Hugh, urges her to seize the chance of happiness with him rather than forfeiting happiness to settle for "being a good person" and the negative virtue of "not hurting people" (252). Her lofty principles are nothing but a cover for her cowardice, he argues, "with [her] Catholic school virtue, and [her] little pat heart, and [her] sense of morals like a gold watch [she] won in Catechism class" (252). Similarly, Felicitas' lover, Robert Cavendish, argues against the sacrifice of happiness in the name of virtue, although his political rhetoric conceals the selfishness at the root of his ideals. The right to pleasure without responsibility is his guiding principle. In Spending, Monica's instinctual recourse to Catholic, or at least broadly Christian values, is juxtaposed with B's espousal of the secular American value of individualism and the right to the pursuit of one's own desires. From B's point of view, the guilt generated by Catholic notions of morality is clearly seen as a force that threatens to hold Monica back from taking advantage of her
"utopian" opportunity. In Italy, for example, while Monica agonizes over the plight of a beggar, B is merely irritated by the beggar's interruption of their tour. Guiltily, Monica rationalizes: "If I could do anything about the world's poverty, I would do it," but admits to herself that she wishes the poor could be "kept out of sight while [she] was seeing what it was [she'd] come to see" (90). For B, however, service to others is secondary to one's obligation to fulfill oneself. He tells Monica that the "most important thing for [her] is to do her work" (90). Monica, the ex-Catholic fears, however, that those who selfishly pursue their own desires while ignoring the plight of others "will be horribly punished by the angel of justice, who will not be exalted, shining, carrying a sword, but filthy and vengeful, with closed, hard eyes" (90).

While Monica has clearly abandoned the practice of Catholicism, and seems, in her sexual freedom, to have thrown off the legacy of guilt which Gordon sees as dogging the heels of cradle Catholics, the shadow of doubt regarding the morality of her relationship with her male "Muse" remains in Monica's mind. Her locker-room crudity seems to be a mode of feisty defiance against the voices within which promise retribution for sexual immorality. Her constant comparisons between the norms of expected male and female behaviour are chiefly drawn from sexual differences, since the disparity is rooted, from Monica's point of view, in notions of male and female sexuality. Underlying Monica's fear is the notion that in the public mind, a man's work is easily separated from his artistic performance because males are traditionally taught to be able to separate their emotions from their intellects. If she is to be taken seriously as a painter, she reasons, she must paint like a man by keeping her feelings for her model, who is also her lover, out of the work emerging upon the canvas:

If a woman painter was going to be serious, not an embarrassment, not a painter of chocolate box or calendar art or her own menstrual or menopausal nightmares, she had to be distant. That, because she was a woman, she had to work extra hard to prevent the hot fluid of desire from steaming up her glasses. In the school [she] wanted to belong to, the one presided over by the austere, modernist fathers, there was no space for female desire. (80)

Competing with Monica's resolve not to "remove" herself from her paintings but to
paint the body of a man with whom she is physically intimate (80), is a warning voice that she finds it difficult to refute since she cannot determine its source. She cannot tell whether it comes from the male painters who dominate the school to which she aspires, who say, "stupid girl. . . . You can be one or the other, a woman who desires and is desired or a painter. Choose" (80), or from "a chaste older sister" (perhaps a wiser self), who warns that "desire has weakened women, it is only by denying our desire we have had what little place we have" (80). Despite the voices of dissent which trouble her, Monica hangs on to the knowledge that her sexual relationship with B both feeds and informs her work and is determined not to omit it from "the process" or the product.

Monica's relationship with B is from beginning to end a "pantomime of sex," minutely described in the frankest terms. Indeed, their verbal interaction amounts to little more than light banter while they seem to communicate with each other mainly with their bodies, not only in private, but also on aeroplanes and in cinemas. The novel's detailed descriptions of numerous and varied sexual acts might seem, to many readers, to be gratuitous, but Gordon obviously hopes that they will serve to illustrate the important role of sexuality in women's lives, and particularly in their creativity. There are embarrassing moments in the narrative, however, in which the reader hopes Gordon is writing with "tongue in cheek," but fears that Gordon may be unaware that at times the effect of her frank descriptions of sexual episodes are comic rather than erotic. To cite an example, on a journey in which Monica and B travel in convoy in separate vehicles, Monica signals her lover to pull over because she has an irresistible urge to smell his armpit. After reading a number of such passages, the reader is not surprised to learn that Gordon was a 1998 nominee for "the Literary Review's Bad Sex Prize," an annual award which is "presided over by the son of Brideshead Revisited author Evelyn Waugh" (Gazlay B1+). The purpose of the award, according to the Literary Review and Auberon Waugh, is "to draw attention to the crude, tasteless, often perfunctory use of redundant passages of sexual description in the modern novel, and to discourage it" (B2).
Possibly, however, Gordon's purple prose may be intended to be understood as satire directed at the modern romance with its obsessive focus upon sexuality.

Clearly Monica belongs at the other end of the Catholic spectrum from Lodge's hesitant hedonists and Gordon's own newly emerged adventurers of *Final Payments* and *The Company of Women*. Monica has no difficulty conceiving of sexual activity as recreation and detaching it from its procreative function. She happily admits to numerous sexual relationships and revels in her robust sexual appetite. If her libidinous reminiscences seem shocking in a woman -- she tells the reader who might innocently ask what her "Prince Charming" looks like, for example, that she is thinking about his hair as it looks when his head is between her legs (17) -- there are frequent reminders that she has, in this utopian divertimento, the right to behave and express herself as a male artist would do. The inference is that if the reader is uncomfortable with Monica's earthy language and rampant sexuality because she is a woman, he or she may be applying a double standard.

Gordon is successful in extracting humour from the contrast between the traditional fairy tale princess who is young, beautiful, and innocent, and the middle-aged and sexually seasoned Monica. In the utopian world of *Spending*, despite her aging body and her vulgarity, Monica is "selected" to be the focus of a rich and eligible divorcée's passion, both as a woman and as an artist. Furthermore, in this "divertimento," there is be no "come-uppance" for Monica's assumption of the traditionally male prerogative of artistic selfishness and no final payments to be made for her "unfair advantages." In this "best of all possible worlds," there is no punishment for Monica's blasphemy in melding sex and religion in her paintings and her exploited lover continues to adore her. She breaks the rules, and thrives. Furthermore, in subtitling the novel a utopian divertimento, Gordon pre-empts criticism of the novel's fortuitous breaks and unlikely coincidences. Gordon never for a moment allows her reader to dismiss the question which hangs over Monica's every move and utterance: why should selfishness and rampant sexuality be expected and excused in a male artist but distasteful (to say the
least) in a female painter?

Also conspicuous in their absence in this best of all possible worlds are the natural and expected problems of female middle age, the mood swings caused by declining hormones, the irregular cycle, the inexorable pull of gravity against slackening flesh. Although by no means in her physical prime, Monica is still slim and beautiful. Monica's age, in this utopia, means that she is "too old now to lose anything by [an affair]. [She] almost certainly couldn't even get pregnant anymore. One of the many things [she and B] could both count on was that [they] were past many things that once might have been at stake" (27). Equally fortuitously, B's well-preserved body has suffered no decline in ability to perform in the bedroom. Such fairy tale perfection serves to simplify the picture and leaves the canvas clear for Gordon's central concern in the novel: what might a female artist achieve, and what might her relationship with a man be like if their roles were reversed and if she had all the resources and allowances traditionally furnished to the male?

Monica has put aside her Catholic training almost as a putting aside of childish things. However, its influence clearly remains and fuels her instinctual responses to criticism of both her work and her lifestyle. While Gordon's fictional gaze remains fixed upon the lives of women, its focus in Spending is less upon her heroine as a Catholic emerging into the mainstream of American society than upon the ways in which women can fulfil their potential in a world which in so many ways still privileges the male. However, in the "what-if" scenario which forms the structure for Spending, Monica's abandoned Catholicism is at the root of the tension between her determination to grasp all the advantages that B's generosity and unflagging devotion provide and the doubts which spring involuntarily to mind when her confidence in her decisions is rocked by criticism.

The connection between generosity and sex is one which both Lodge and Gordon explore in their efforts to provide some kind of moral anchor now that the theological moorings of the sexual act have been loosened. Despite their argument with traditional Catholic notions
of sexual morality, both are clearly reluctant to view the sexual act as a mere form of recreation between consenting partners and both try to build a new framework of moral meaning for the act. Gordon seems to be most adventurous in this regard. Rather than attempting to redefine notions of purity and chastity, both Lodge and Gordon explore the possibility that by equating sexuality with other virtues, such as generosity and compassion, it may be possible to detach human sexuality from its connotations of sin without denying its connection with the spiritual. At the centre of Gordon's fiction is her incarnational approach to human sexuality. With The Company of Women's Father Cyprian, Gordon believes that Christ became flesh because the body and its needs and desires are intrinsically good. Although for Gordon body and spirit are a somewhat "quarrelsome" team (Morey 1061), she is determined to celebrate the flesh and its "astounding" ability to give and receive love since it is a sign and reflection of God's love made manifest in the incarnation of His son.
Chapter IV

Piers Paul Read

As a conservative – some critics might say reactionary – Catholic, the English novelist Piers Paul Read places himself at the opposite end of the spectrum of orthodoxy from his contemporary, David Lodge, and it is hardly surprising to find that Read has taken to task those liberal novelists, including Lodge, whom he believes are hastening the demise of the Catholic novel by bending too easily to the winds of passing theological fashion. In fact, in his article, “The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Novel” (Times 20), Read refers to Lodge specifically as one among the liberal Catholic writers who have succumbed to the modern penchant for moral relativism, and have, consequently, helped to render the future of the Catholic novel “uncertain.” Read argues that the high point of the Catholic novel was reached in the 1940s when the Catholic converts Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene wrote novels of “specifically Catholic content” in which neither writer softened his uncompromising attitude toward sin to pander to the less exacting moral sensibilities of his contemporary secular readership. Waugh’s and Greene’s emphasis on the Catholic notion of renunciation, Read argues (and the examples he provides are incidences of sexual renunciation, one cannot help noticing) did nothing “to impede their popularity or their critical acclaim.” He goes on to suggest that the miracles which made possible the renunciation of the lovers in both Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited and Greene’s The End of the Affair would be dismissed as “eccentricity” or even “neurosis” by today’s readers.

In these words Read seems to suggest that what made Waugh’s and Greene’s novels best sellers was not that they had been written by novelists of the highest calibre, but the fact that their readers were members of “a nation in which the majority accepted the basic tenets of Christian teaching” and were, therefore, willing to accept Waugh’s and Greene’s theological content and packaging. Modern secular society, Read seems to suggest, does not “buy” the Christian concept of the renunciation of immediate gratification in the interests of moral health.
and might, therefore, be expected to reject the work of Greene and Waugh if these writers were publishing novels today. A modern readership, Read implies, rejects the existence of moral absolutes and wants instead to be fed a body of fiction awash in the blander gravy of moral relativism. However, in response, one might argue that the novels of Greene and Waugh have taken their place among the best of the century's novels because they are beautifully written and because they probe with great insight the questions with which humankind has been preoccupied in all places and times. Waugh and Greene are great writers who happened to be Catholics. After all, we do not read Homer because we are pantheists or Rushdie because we are Moslems. The fiction of Flannery O'Connor fascinates young students of literature today quite as much as it did in the 1950s, despite rather than because of the fact that she was an orthodox Catholic spinster from whose work matters of sexuality are conspicuously absent. It is not necessarily her Catholicism that fascinates, but the way in which she takes the commonplace experiences of human life, and transforms them with a sense of mystery and meaning that celebrate both the uniqueness and the universality of human experience.

Although David Lodge does not respond directly to Read's criticism of liberal Catholic novelists, in his review of Read's latest novel, *Knights of the Cross*, he does allude to it. Lodge agrees that "the metaphysical skepticism and moral relativism of secular society in the late twentieth century has permeated Catholic consciousness and writing by Catholics," and he applauds Read's latest novel, *Knights of the Cross*, as an "interesting and ingenious attempt to address" the issue of "the loss of dogmatic certainty in Catholic culture" (*Tablet* 674). However, he criticizes Read for "the Gothic and melodramatic nature" of his narrative at the point in the novel where the hero undergoes a religious transformation. It is not the metaphysical experience itself which Lodge finds unconvincing, but the narrative style in which the experience is couched. Lodge seems to be countering Read's criticism of liberal Catholics who have found themselves infected by the modern virus of moral relativism by observing that Read himself is most "entertaining and thought-provoking" when he writes "in a tone of weary
skepticism" which speaks to the empirical experience of human life far more convincingly than the moral certainty of the apologist.

In his review, Lodge seems to suggest that Read’s strongly felt need to provide an apologetic for the orthodox Catholic metaphysic constrains him to adopt, at times, a narrative style more suited to an age in which didacticism was both accepted and expected by the reading public. "Dramatic stories of sin and grace no longer command the unqualified belief of Catholics or pluck a sympathetic chord in non-Catholic readers" in Lodge’s view (my emphasis), and the writer must find a narrative style consonant with the prevailing temper of the times or risk losing the interest and sympathy of his or her reader. Put another way, Lodge’s response to Read’s accusation that liberal Catholic writers are digging their own literary graves is to point out that it is not unfashionable ideas which render a writer unreadable but unconvincing portrayals of those ideas in action. Good fiction, according to Lodge, is successful in both entertaining and provoking thought because it reflects and encapsulates the mood of its time rather than harks back dogmatically to theological certainties and moral absolutes no longer widely shared. Ironically, Lodge reflects, despite Read’s nostalgia for the Catholic novels of the past, such as those of Evelyn Waugh, which championed orthodoxy with quite overt didacticism, Read is most successful when he allows not his dogmatism, but his world-weariness and his doubt to inform his narrative.

Less gentle critics than David Lodge have found fault with what Philip Flynn has referred to as the "explicitly didactic and religious strain" (631) found in Read’s later novels. He has also been strongly criticized for depicting “the dismal Catholic scenario” – presumably in common with Graham Greene – which “insists that God may only be approached by way of man’s complete physical and emotional degradation” (631). In his review of Read’s 1979 novel, A Married Man, Paul Ableman dismisses the central character, John Strickland, as a figure who has “long since ceased to be human and has contracted to the dimensions of a symbolic figure in a theological tract.” He goes on to argue that John is “not really a free character in a free universe but a football booted about by an author bent on scoring
theological goals, and Read is "a forger who leaves out the water mark" (Spectator 21). While it seems that such critics are irritated more by Read's personal theodicy than the mere fact of his choosing to share his religious convictions by weaving them into the fabric of his fiction, Flynn seems to have been proved partially correct when he projected in 1983 that "the orthodox form of] Catholicism that provides Read's fiction with its moral center could prove to be the artist's liability, narrowing the subjects or circle of readers he can touch" (631). While time has shown that Read's vision has not narrowed down the field of his fictional subjects, it has probably narrowed his readership. The accusation leveled at Read that his novels represent "theology masquerading" is less than fair, however, as the following discussion which focuses upon two of his novels will show. Yet there is a tendency in Read, as many critics have noted, not only to cloud "his own novelist's dilemmas with heavy melodrama," as Melvin Maddocks complains of Read's 1971 novel, The Professor's Daughter (Time W3), but to forfeit the integrity of his characters in his zeal to reach his forgone and orthodox Catholic conclusion. While these criticisms are grave, it must be said that Read's strengths as a writer -- his skillful story-telling, his engaging prose style, and his talent for recognizing and exposing hypocrisy and self-deceit -- make his novels far more than mere Catholic tracts. His main characters are much more than allegorical figures designed to represent the vices that in Read's view the secular world allows to flourish and their corresponding virtues. They are for the most part roundly and skillfully drawn, although one or two -- Henry Mascall, the devilish seducer of A Married Man, for example -- are reminiscent of characters from mediaeval morality plays. Furthermore, not all critics have condemned Read for his didacticism. Some, like David Holden in his review of Read's non-fiction work, Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors (1974), maintain that Read "never pushes his moral messages, but rather lets them rise, questioningly and disturbingly, out of the reader's own reflections" (Spectator 611).

Read's Catholic orthodoxy is reflected in his treatment of female characters as well as in the moral structure of his fiction. Although he is sympathetic toward women, there are occasions when it seems that, in Read's view, men have greater moral capacity than women,
and have, therefore, greater moral responsibility. Perhaps because of this attitude, more often than not Read’s women are secondary players in the moral dramas in which his male heroes are engaged. For, like Lodge, Read tends to focus upon a central male protagonist. Indeed, he does so even in his misleadingly titled novel, *The Professor’s Daughter*. Unsurprisingly then, Read’s female characters tend to be the victims of male sexual transgression, as are, for instance, the sisters, Clare and Martha, in *The Upstart*. Where they fall into sexual sin, as do Louisa, in *The Professor’s Daughter*, and the wronged wife, Clare, in *A Married Man*, Read makes it clear that their sin is the direct result of a moral betrayal by a male figure, such as a husband or father, who has responsibility for their moral well being. In Read’s fiction, women are more sinned against than sinning, and men are the principal protagonists in the battle waged between good and evil. Chief among the sins of Read’s female characters is a reluctance to accept the secondary role within which, as wives and mothers, biblical law and Church teaching places them. According to Read, it seems, a bored housewife provides easy access for the devil in his attempts to disrupt the family which Read sees as the foundational unit of a moral society. Clare, in Read’s *A Married Man*, and Lilian, the professor’s wife in *The Professor’s Daughter*, are prime examples of wives who fail to appreciate the importance of their supporting roles. In contrast, the child-bride, Martha, in Read’s 1973 novel, *The Upstart*, comes to terms so cheerfully and willingly with the curtailment of her youth in her “shot-gun” marriage to the converted villain of the novel that he is able to grow to love her.

Read’s tendency to view women as less morally capable than men is reflective of the spirit of the pre-Conciliar Church in which more progressive notions of women’s capabilities had not yet made themselves felt in a practical way. Read’s gentleness toward his female characters seems to be partly the result of his rather old-fashioned view of women as dependent upon male chivalry and of his sense of women’s vulnerability in the face of male perfidy. Perhaps more surprising, in a novelist of orthodox views, is the absence from Read’s fiction of any tendency to blame women’s bodies for the sexual sins of men. Like the liberal novelist, David Lodge, Read clearly likes and admires women and, like Lodge, is fair in his
judgements of their shortcomings, individual and collective. One might expect such generosity toward women in a liberal Catholic novelist since a rethinking of traditional assumptions about the nature and needs of women is part of the package of concerns which have emerged from the findings of the Second Vatican Council. However, in a novelist of such staunchly orthodox views as Read's, such gentleness and generosity toward female characters is not always a given. The physician-turned-writer, A.J. Cronin, for example, is guilty of depicting women as unwitting agents of Satan, instrumental in leading men morally astray, and Flannery O'Connor, who claimed to be orthodox in her Christianity (although she did not claim this for her Catholicism), provides few sympathetically drawn female characters, especially where they wield power normally (and, I suspect, in O'Connor's view, properly) the prerogative of men. Even the liberal Catholic writer, Mary Gordon, particularly as she has moved away from a Catholic focus in her fiction toward a greater emphasis upon feminism, seems to appreciate women only in proportion to their willingness to behave in a way that, traditionally, men have been allowed to do. Gordon's painter, Monica Szabo, in Spending, is a woman in whom bawdiness and selfishness are no more agreeable than they would be in a man, and Monica is not a likeable woman, even in the comic context of Gordon's utopian divertimento. What is particularly appealing about Read's female characters is that, like Milton's Eve, in Paradise Lost, they possess the attributes traditionally equated with the female sex in tandem with a propensity to overcome the limitations of both their humanity in general and their gender in particular. Clare, the spurned wife in Read's 1979 novel, A Married Man, is an especially pertinent example, as I shall show below.

While Read does not fall foul of the tendency to blame women's seductive wiles for male sexual transgression – a propensity which many feminist theologians, such as Uta Ranke-Heinemann, see as part of the orthodox package – his narratives do place sexual sin at the top of the list in terms of severity. As Marian E. Crowe has noted in this context, Read's theology is not only conservative, but also "out of step with much of the moral teaching in his own Roman Catholic communion" (313). The contemporary Church "reflects today's more
relaxed and tolerant attitude toward sex" in its “teaching, catechesis, and pastoral practice” (313). In the modern Church, Crowe suggests, the subject of sexual sin has given place to a greater emphasis upon social justice, and Read 's insistent focus upon sexual matters may well be an attempt to “correct the correction,” made by the Second Vatican Council.

The stance Read takes in his fiction vis à vis human sexual behaviour sets up a debate-in-fiction with more liberal Catholic novelists -- such as his fellow Englishman, David Lodge, and the American Mary Gordon -- in which the practical applications of the edicts of the Second Vatican Council and its postscript, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, are explored. In his fiction, Read seems at times to be attempting to push back the windows of the church which Pope John XXIII allowed to be opened a little too wide. As noted above, many critics have judged Read’s novels to be homilies thinly disguised as novels.

Read is clearly aware that his insistent focus upon sexual sin has drawn criticism from those who find in it a narrow approach to human weakness. In his 1979 novel, *A Married Man*, he answers indirectly such criticism through one of his characters, a Jesuit priest, called Father Michael Pearce, who counsels the protagonist's troubled wife in a series of letters, but takes no other part in the narrative of events. This unseen priest may be the mouthpiece of Read himself (although Read surely cannot admire Father Michael's dogmatic approach) in attempting to justify the ways of the Church to secular man, particularly the notion that sexual sin is the gateway through which the individual passes on the way to greater moral disorder. In answer to Clare’s cry for help, as she “hurtled toward adultery” (235), he argues that “it is not for nothing that the Church has been so wary of sexual desire. The very strength of this instinct which has preserved our species through so many millennia and inspires *in its proper place* such happiness and beauty, can if misused and perverted wreak great evil and cause much misery” (246). The Jesuit exhorts Clare, who has experienced, first hand, the “misery” caused by the infidelity of her husband, to remain faithful to her faithless husband for the sake of her children, since “Christ had the direst warnings for those who harmed children” (246). In case the prospect of invoking Christ’s greatest displeasure is not enough to deflect Clare from
the commission of sexual sin, Father Pearce invokes natural law, warning Clare in the most melodramatic terms: "You may as well slash at [your children] with a knife as lend your body and your love to another man, for in betraying John and breaking your vows to him you betray them and break the promises implicit in the natural bond between mother and child" (246).

Again, Read may subscribe to the principle of Father Pearce's discourse, even while pointing out, in his portrayal of the priest's dogmatic approach, the widespread failure of the clergy to engage with their flock on the level of their individual doubts and needs. Nevertheless, it is difficult for the reader not to interpret in such passages Read's tendency toward didacticism in that he provides, without apology, a fictional discourse upon the orthodox Catholic position vis-à-vis the nature and meaning of human sexuality. Read provides no discernible irony, for example, to undermine the priest's sweeping dogmatism and alert the reader to an intended criticism of the priest's approach. However, even if, in such passages, Read's purpose is didactic, his novels are much more than mere apology on behalf of the traditional Catholic "party line."

Read imbues his novels with a compassionate and impassioned picture of the loneliness, disappointment, and fear that he sees to be the underlying reasons for sexual sin. The sexual laxity of his characters is motivated less by unrestrained sexual appetite and pure lust than by an alienation and desperation which have their roots in a society which has lost its way and has settled for the side-road of hedonism in the mistaken belief that it is a short-cut to Paradise. As Clare's story, in A Married Man, is intended to show, "serious [i.e. sexual] sin is the thick end of the wedge, but the wedge grows thicker still" (246). Read makes it clear that, in reaching the point where she is about to succumb to the temptation to commit adultery, Clare has made many less serious compromises with Catholic moral law which, as a Catholic, she is required to obey. These lapses had passed unnoticed while the marriage limped along, but they have led inexorably to the greater moral lapse of infidelity. Clare has, seemingly successfully, served two masters during the years of her marriage to John, years in which it seemed that she had found a comfortable compromise between the demands of her middle-
class life and the values she espouses as a Catholic. However, as Father Pearce warns her in an attempt to dissuade her from what he believes to be mortal sin, “evil is indivisible. If you start to follow the devil you can never know where he will lead you” (246).

Adultery turns out to be the middle, rather than the thick edge of the wedge, and for Clare and women like her, the thick end will be the unhappiness she will inevitably bring to herself, her husband, and the lives of her children. In Father Pearce, Read provides a figure of orthodox authority who, despite his compassion, responds to the troubled wife of Read’s married man in the arid and dogmatic language of Church law. Surprisingly, since he espouses orthodox Catholicism, Read portrays the institutional Church, in the figure of Father Pearce, as an intractable monolith which refuses to abandon outdated notions of human sexuality despite the suffering they bring to the lives of the laity. Perhaps Read sees the institutional church as a last, safe bastion of moral order, despite its shortcomings, evident in its spokesman, Father Michael Pearce. Unlike the two writers discussed in the previous two chapters, especially Mary Gordon, whose literary career has been built upon her belief that the Catholic tendency to focus upon the soul at the expense of the body has led to a great deal of suffering, particularly for women, Read advocates a return to the notion that in order to please God we must deny the flesh and hone the spirit. In Father Pearce’s Jansenist terms, which the outcome of the narrative leads the reader to suspect would be Read’s advice to anyone contemplating sexual sin, “[God] created you to be His companion in Heaven, but to do that you must grow from a creature of purely physical instinct – a baby at your mother’s breast – into a spiritual being, a demi-god. What you suffer now are the growing pains of your soul. You teach your children to mature, so God coaxes you through different stages of spiritual growth” (247). It seems that Father Pearce’s view of human sexuality is less mainstream Catholic than Jansenist since he espouses the notion that the sexual instinct is an aspect of human nature that belongs to our unredeemed, animal nature. According to the Jesuit, to deny the prompting of the sexual urge, except within strictly delineated bounds, is to facilitate the
growth of one's soul since the growth of the soul is a process that requires the strict regulation of bodily appetites if it is to take place successfully.

Although Read nowhere suggests that women are more susceptible to sexual vice than are men, he does imply that violations of the moral code by women have more serious and far reaching practical consequences than those of men. There is evident a curious juxtaposition of values in his fiction. Read's female characters are largely enticed or pushed into sin by the neglect or betrayal of men, and are, therefore, to be held less morally culpable than men, whom Read sees as more at the mercy of their sexual drives than women are. Yet, when his women do succumb to sexual temptation, the consequences are more serious than when, for example, a man decides to have a sexual liaison outside his marriage. As Clare says in her third letter to Father Pearce, "It's different for men" (238). At the root of this seeming double standard is Read's belief that women are less able to separate their emotions from their sexual behaviour. In a significant exchange between diners at a dinner party, Clare, the only Catholic present, may speak for Read when she answers the question, can women, like men, "have dirty weekends in Paris and then come home to be perfectly good [spouses] thereafter?" She proffers the opinion that "a woman tends to love the man she sleeps with, doesn't she? And if she loves him, she wants to be with him. That's what breaks up the family" (44). Thus, for Read, what is in fact a feminine virtue – an inability or reluctance to separate sex from love – can become a liability if a woman fails to understand the grave responsibility she has toward her children.

The novel, A Married Man, tells the story of John Strickland, a barrister in early middle age, who suddenly realizes, after reading a short story by Tolstoy entitled "The Death of Ivan Ilych," that "real" success in life has eluded him. At this point of vulnerability in his own life, John rather melodramatically sees himself in the situation of Tolstoy's young lawyer whose contented life crumbles as he succumbs to a mortal illness. Ivan find himself hating more and more his "healthy family" and "bland, complacent wife" who, while he slowly dies, "continue to live as before" (20). Ivan's family is oblivious to the fact of which imminent death has made
Ivan acutely aware, that life is "a series of increasing sufferings" which "flies further and further towards its end – the most terrible suffering . . . There is no explanation. Agony, death . . . what for?" (20). Apparently it is the attitude toward Ivan of his bland, complacent wife which strikes so deep a chord in John's own discontented soul. It provides him with the idea that will provide the impetus and justification for his actions as the narrative unfolds: his wife, who has most inconsiderately lost her youthful beauty, no longer takes him seriously. Indeed, she may no longer love him.

As a result of a few moments of introspection and in a mood of grandiose self-pity, John identifies Ivan's existential angst as his own. In pondering the source of his chronic case of "Ivan Ilychitis," John quickly locates it outside himself. His disappointment, "despair, and self-doubt" are all due to his having, long ago, decided to marry Clare. "The life they had led since they married reflected her values, not his", he reflects, even though, in the days of their courtship, he had assaulted "her conventional opinions about both politics and morality until her arguments had been defeated" (57). The ensuing pages of the novel record John's attempts to find the success that he believes has eluded him by pursuing a long abandoned dream of going into politics and by taking a young mistress. The novel is written in the form of a spiritual journey in which the violent death of his wife, for which he must accept much of the responsibility, leads to John's spiritual awakening. John has lived comfortably according to a loose collection of "situational ethics" based upon "what he and his friends would do" (64), but the murder of his wife forcefully brings home to John the terrible acts which such "ad hoc" ethics condone – and perhaps encourage – when taken to their logical extreme. Like John, his mistress Paula has fallen for what Anita Gandolfo terms "the sentimental love ethic" (211), which justifies all in the name of love. Paula arranges for Clare to be murdered, justifying her act with the words "what was done . . . was done because I love you" (261).

The Stricklands are a middle-class couple who constantly bemoan, despite their comfortable lifestyle, the fact that they are unable to afford the luxuries enjoyed by many of their friends. Each secretly blames the other for their boredom and dissatisfaction, but neither
is prepared to disrupt the comfortable torpor of their daily lives to discuss it. They settle instead for a routine of bickering and verbal sniping that does nothing to resolve their problems. The novel is written from a third person point of view, but largely from the perspective of John, the married man of the novel's title. Almost until the end of the novel, the reader's view of Clare comes largely from her husband's jaundiced point of view. Since he is bored with her and has long since ceased to take an interest in her or bother to look beyond the surface of her discontent for its reasons, she appears to be an unexceptional woman with little in her character to engage the reader's interest. John has ego enough for both, however, and where the novel might well have grown tedious in its recounting of John's self-absorbed activities, the huge gap between John's elevated conception of himself and the narrator's skillful "between the lines" construction of his character make the narrative both compelling and amusing.

Clare's revelation of herself, however, when the reader finally meets her in her letters to Father Pearce, is all the more arresting since John's resentful musings upon his wife and their marriage give away no sign of her true depth of character. In her letters to Father Peace, Clare reveals an ability to avoid the devious casuistry that permits John to confuse what he wants with what he has a right to. Unlike John, whose capacity for self-pity and self-delusion is at once comic and contemptible, Clare is bravely and scrupulously honest. The perceptive assessment of her husband she provides for Father Pearce's benefit mirrors perfectly the reader's impression of John which his own words and the narrator's ironic account convey. In her judgement of her husband, Clare speaks for Read himself in his familiar role as "sad, skilled connoisseur of the moral blindness that occurs when self-righteousness and self-interest try to be one," as Melvin Maddocks puts it in his review of the novel (W3). In fact, in terms of Read's apologetic intent, the novel as a whole can be seen as a trialogue, if you will, between Father Pearce who perhaps represents Read's orthodox view of sexual sin from a distanced and theoretical position, Clare, who is desperate to find a compromise which will take into account the unhappiness of her situation, and Clare's father, who seems to represent
the Read who lives and acts within the world in a way in which Father Pearce does not.

Father Pearce does little more than repeat and interpret the rules in a manner which is intended to be compassionate but which is, in reality, rather harsh. If Father Pearce is Read's "head," his intellectual conception of Catholic moral truth, perhaps Clare's father is his "heart," the part of Read which is actively engaged in the daily struggle to reconcile the rules with the game.

Clare is the daughter of a middle-class English Catholic couple. Her father, Eustace, is a retired brigadier, and Helen, her mother is both a "subtle Catholic snob" and a "simple social snob." She proudly traces her ancestry back to "one of the oldest families in England – Catholics loyal to the Pope not through intellectual conviction or intermarriage with an Irishman but by hereditary right stretching back beyond the torture and persecution under Elizabeth, beyond the reformation itself, to the Middle Ages when all Englishmen were Catholics" (8). Read's married man, John, had been quick to notice the "latent hypocrisy" in the Catholics to whom his marriage has introduced him. His mother-in-law's "religious convictions" for example, "[do] not seem to hamper her somewhat cruel treatment of [her husband], just as he had noted before that Clare's friends from her Catholic convent were the first to deceive their husbands" (11). Thus, Clare's Catholicism is for John just one reason among many to despise her. His own ethics, he believes, are "more robust" than Clare's Catholic moral standards, based as they are upon "decency and common sense," rather than upon "such dubious notions as sin and redemption" (63-4).

It is only when John reads Tolstoy's account of the terminal sufferings of Ivan Ilych, and begins to have intimations of his own mortality that John envies Clare the assurance of an afterlife that his own agnostic philosophy cannot provide. He begins to see it as yet another march she has stolen over him because, "not only would Clare outlive him, but when she died she would believe she was going to Heaven whereas John, an agnostic, had no faith whatsoever in an afterlife; so while she could look forward to eternal bliss he lay dreading the empty unknown" (22). However, in one of her letters to Father Michael, Clare observes that
John’s agnosticism is less about faith and belief than it is about standing firm in opposition to his wife’s beliefs and values. Clare shrewdly – and prophetically, as it turns out – observes: “John won’t believe in God until I’m dead so I hope that I die first” (243). However, John’s ambivalence regarding his wife’s faith lies below the surface of his consciousness. Apart from those moments when the spectre of his own death appears to haunt him, John is able to dismiss Clare’s faith as a largely harmless foible which he has “never really talked to her about” (146).

The verbal communication that is vital to a good relationship seems to have been one of the earliest casualties of the Strickland marriage. Even their sex life is conducted via a series of non-verbal signals that do little to explain the feelings of one partner toward the other. On the day that John encounters Tolstoy’s tragic story of Ivan Ilych, for example, Clare and John engage in the kind of pantomime which they have developed during the twelve years of their marriage, a mute series of rituals designed to shrink to a bare minimum the amount of real communication required of them in their daily life:

They switched off their bedside lamps and then embraced under the blankets as they had embraced every night since they had married – a gesture which served not just to express a residual affection for one another but to demonstrate by its intensity whether one or other or both were in the mood to make love. It had been evolved after those crises of the early years of their marriage when Clare, bored by the monotonous and mechanical expression of his so-called love, had refused his advances – leaving him baffled and humiliated. Later of course, she had grown out of her illusions, and that night at Busey it was she who placed one of her long legs over his body and kissed him with soft lips and half-open mouth. But still possessed by Ivan Ilych, John’s body remained rigid beside hers. He gave her an abrupt kiss with pursed lips, so she turned to face away, wished him goodnight, and in a short time was asleep. (20-21)

While both partners are to blame for this poor communication, Clare elicits greater sympathy for once having had hopes of building a close and loving relationship in which the sexual act would provide a means of giving and exchanging love which went far beyond the mere mechanics of the act itself. Although such idealism is not confined to young Catholic brides, it does suggest that Clare has given at least some thought and credence to the Christian ideal of married love.
Since it seems likely that Clare has already ignored the teaching of the Church by using artificial methods of birth control – she has had two well-spaced pregnancies – it seems reasonable to conclude that Read has decided to leave that topic behind as a lost cause. What he does set out to do, however, is to show that Clare has been "hurting toward" serious sin, such as adultery, during the whole of her adult life in attempting to conduct her life with one foot in the world and the other in the Church. Read uses a similar technique in his 1971 novel, The Professor's Daughter, to show that slow progression toward serious sin is the result of many smaller, seemingly insignificant infractions of moral law which the sinner justifies by recourse to moral relativism. John assumes that because Clare is not "notably pious," and has not allowed the claims of her faith to place noticeable restrictions upon their life together, her religion is no more to her than an accident of birth.

While on the surface, it seems that John may be right in thinking that Clare's religion is merely something that is "in her family" (146), there are glimpses of a yearning in Clare for a deeper commitment to the Christian ideal of a strong marriage, if not to the faith of her birth. One such moment occurs when Clare arrives home from midnight mass, her "inoffensive face" radiant. She expresses a wish that the experience could have been a shared one and, after she and John have filled the children's stockings, she initiates intercourse seemingly as a sign of her desire to share with her husband the joy which the Church service had given her. Clearly, at this stage, Clare has the will to make her marriage a success. John recognizes in her a commitment to his own ideals, even if she cannot share them, although he chooses to see her loyalty as "dutiful self-sacrifice" (150). Even filtered through John's view, distorted as it is by his wounded sense of his own entitlement, a picture emerges of Clare which shows a woman hopefully on the alert for an opportunity to recreate the close relationship which she and John have lost, rather than taking refuge in fantasies of romantic liaisons with more exciting and attentive partners, as John does.

John finds it convenient to focus the vague discontent he is experiencing with regard to the direction of his life upon the too, too solid flesh of his wife. John's philosophy, based as it
is on rather loose definitions of fairness and the right to happiness, does not distinguish between "erotic inclination" and "conjugal love," a distinction which is Read's central concern in the novel. The factors which had made Clare seem a sensible choice of wife in his youth, her beauty, her good breeding, and her contacts with the English upper classes, now seem to him to have been baits deliberately set to deflect him from his true calling. It had been Clare, he decides, who had made him abandon the socialist ideals of his lower middle-class youth. He converts the "terror of disease and death" which his father-in-law assures him are, according to Jung, the expected symptoms of middle age, into a "venomous aversion" to his wife. He decides that, "if his life had gone wrong it was from the moment he had married Clare, and for the first time in his life John [feels that he hate[s] her" (22). Although the narrator describes Clare as a woman " with the confident gait of those who are tall and attractive" (6), John compares her to the "smiling, trembling girl," he had first met, and finds her, after twelve years of marriage and two children, sadly wanting. Since she now "smells like an old woman" and has become "like a sucked out grape" (22) he turns from her to "hormone-sodden" fantasies in which a younger and less well-used woman is given the starring role. The fact that time has driven his hair from his forehead and turned his stomach "white and flaccid" escapes his notice, and he tries to obtain the kind of feminine attention he feels he deserves by pursuing -- unsuccessfully as it turns out -- the young and nubile daughter of the couple who are their best friends. John is able to wonder whether or not his wife still loves him, but his very limited imagination does not allow him to realize that she, too, may long for the very kind of appreciation which he feels he lacks. That Clare is, in fact, experiencing similar feelings of neglect is evident from her epistolary outpourings to Father Michael.

The letters which Clare and Father Pearce exchange, and which the Jesuit sends to John after Clare's death -- because, "although she says some hard things about [her husband], she also describes the way she loved [him]" (234) -- justify a detailed examination since they shed useful light upon Read's view of women and sexuality and because Clare's letters reveal her to be a remarkable woman. Furthermore, if the letters are read with the
circumstances of her tragic death in mind, Read's theodicy becomes increasingly clear. The
tone of Clare's first letter, while her relationship with the husband of her best friend is in its
early stages, is lighthearted. Evidently Father Pearce has moved far up the ecclesiastic ladder
since the day, twelve years before, when he married John and Clare. He now resides in
Rome and acts as an *éminence grise* to Pope Paul, whom Clare flippantly remarks is "grise
enough already" (235). Clare is quick to point out that her temptation to commit adultery is not
due to an irresistible sexual attraction toward another man. She is tempted, she admits,
because "life is pretty dull" (235) and it is difficult to resist when one is "flattered and desired"
(236). Tellingly, Clare does not blame her hunger for male attention upon her husband's
neglect. She is firmly determined from the start to be honest. She admits that in agreeing to
keep her meetings with Henry secret from her husband and his wife she has already
committed a sin against both. She also recognizes that her craving for a diversion from the
tedium of her married life is at the root of her weakness. While being at least partially aware of
the danger that she is in, Clare admits that she has prayed only "feebly" to be delivered from
the temptation which Henry Mascall represents," rather like a modern day Augustine asking
God for chastity, "but not yet." At this point, it seems that although Clare says she sees herself
"hurting toward adultery," in the excitement of the liaison, which brings her the admiration and
attention she has been missing, she is not fully aware of the peril that lies ahead. Father
Pearce, however, from the distance which Rome and his priestly celibacy afford him, is able to
appreciate the danger of Clare's situation and to warn her.

Father Pearce answers Clare with the observation that all marriages are bound to go
stale with time and that if human beings had no immortal souls, taking a new partner in order
to perk up one's sex life would be the obvious and sensible answer. However, Father Pearce
points out, human beings do have souls and therefore if Clare gives in to her adulterous urge
she will "suffer because adultery is unquestionably sinful and sin offends God and damages
the soul" (237). With this rather pat response, seemingly taken straight from the Catechism,
the Jesuit advises Clare to stop seeing Henry Mascall, to forgo the "sexual oblivion" which an
affair might be expected to provide, to ask God to help her appreciate the “subtler joys” of her life, and to commune more often with nature. It seems that, at this stage, Father Pearce feels that a stern reminder of the rules will be enough to deter Clare from taking the path of sin. In mentioning Clare’s husband, however, of whom she says little in her first letter, Father Pearce unwittingly rubs salt in the wound that has encouraged Clare to respond to the philandering Henry in the first place. In exhorting her to consider her husband, he says,

I cannot believe that you would want to hurt and humiliate him. And what sort of home would it be for your children if you separate? Or live together hating and resenting one another? The Church is often accused of being obsessed with sins of the flesh and repressing people’s natural desires: I would not want you to think of the sin which tempts you as one against chastity but rather as one against love — love of your husband, love of your children and love of God. (237)

What Father Pearce seems to be arguing here is that Clare’s adultery, should she succumb to the temptation, would constitute a sin against her ordained role as wife and mother. He sees Clare not as an individual seeking a solution to a set of unique problems but as a wife and mother about to violate the terms of her calling.

The fact that Father Pearce has responded to her appeal for help by reminding her of the responsibilities of her role rather than examining the particulars of her unique situation is not lost on Clare. In her second letter, Clare concedes that all that Father Pearce has said is true according to the official teaching of the Church, but she adds, “there are one or two things which you couldn’t be expected to know which don’t excuse my behaviour but make things a little different” (238). Clare recognizes that at this stage, the priest regards her in her role rather than as an individual in a unique set of circumstances. She asks him to look past the wife and mother and see her as a lonely and unappreciated woman. She goes on to explain that her husband is unfaithful to her, but insists that she is not tempted to have an affair with Henry Mascall just to “get back at John” for his faithlessness, but because he is dull and insincere. Her account of her husband accords with the account of himself which his behaviour and his thoughts, recounted by the gently ironic narrator, have given. Clare is an
astute judge of character who sees through her husband's professed motives to the egotism hidden beneath.

Furthermore, Clare's clear sightedness is not limited to the man whom she has ceased to love romantically. She is equally honest where her soon-to-be lover is concerned. She recognizes that his reasons for wanting her are based not on love but on a diabolical desire to take something that properly belongs to his best friend. She recognizes the evil inherent in his attempts to persuade her to sleep with him by undermining her religious convictions, when he tells her that "he'd had more Catholic girls than all the others put together...that if [she] didn't sleep with him it would be thanks to middle-class pudeur, not the grace of God. He names a string of Catholic women who were well-known to have lovers" and adds that "the Catholic Church ha[s] given up the concept of "mortal" sin because it [is] intellectually untenable" (239).

At this point, the reader begins to wonder what indeed is the attraction that Henry holds for Clare. Father Pearce is equally perplexed as to why a woman of Clare's insight and integrity should be attracted to such a "cynical and destructive" man.

Father Pearce responds to Clare's list of extenuating circumstances by returning the focus of the discourse to Clare's responsibilities as a wife and mother. He is clearly a compassionate man, anxious to guide away from the path of sexual sin the woman who has turned to him for spiritual help. Yet he seems unable to discuss Clare's situation except in the blanket terms of Church law and traditional roles. As Marian E. Crowe has observed, Clare's "thoughtful, probing questions have an authenticity and humanness that are lacking in the moralizing of Father Michael" (324), and it is difficult to believe that Read expects the Jesuit's "wooden and formulaic response" to appear adequate in solving the "serious moral dilemmas" (325) of Catholics such as Clare. Father Michael fails Clare because he can only see her in her letters as a wife and mother. He cannot see her as an individual. Rather than acknowledging the clarity of Clare's insights and allowing her to share her feelings without judging her, he takes issue with Clare for belittling her husband's political aspirations. He suggests that, since Henry is "consciously taking advantage of [her] boredom and, perhaps, of
[her] contempt for John” (240-1), she might try taking an interest in John’s life and aspirations, thus curing herself of boredom and Henry of his lust for her in one stroke. He adds, in a rather nasty, below-the-belt thrust, that she may well be responsible for her husband’s infidelity: “If he didn’t sense that you despised him perhaps he wouldn’t chase after other women” (241).

Apparently, Father Michael subscribes to the notion which has its origins in Christian tradition and which also enjoys widespread credence in secular society, that it is a wife’s moral duty to prevent her husband from straying and, if he does so, it must be due to some deficiency in herself. How Clare is to prevent herself despising someone who shows himself to be as patently despicable as John does, Father Pearce does not say. Instead, he refers her to the official rules and to what one might call the proper sentiments of a dutiful wife. He closes with the advice that Clare exalt in her temptation since it means she has “a soul worth having” (241). Any woman less intent on reconciling her desires with the tenets of her religious faith than Clare would have given up on Father Pearce at this point. The fact that she continues to seek his advice in a further letter in which she explores her motives with painful honesty is testimony to the depth of her desire to remain a Catholic, and her determination, if she cannot resist temptation, to know precisely the nature of her sin and its possible consequences.

It is no wonder that in her reply to Father Michael’s moralizing letter, Clare expresses a fear that she is losing the battle against temptation because “God leaves [her] too much on [her] own” (240). Father Michael has presented an ecclesiastical scenario in which a less “mechanistic” Church allows the individual Catholic greater moral autonomy, yet provides no concessions in terms of penalties for erroneous decisions. The course to be run is no longer clearly laid out, yet the stakes remain as high as ever. Clare is voicing a complaint frequently heard among Catholics with regard to the relaxation of Church law when she says that “once the Church says that a sin isn’t necessarily fatal to one’s relationship with God then I’m afraid the floodgates are opened” (241-2). The mechanistic mode of moral reasoning had served Clare well during her marriage to John up until this point. Now that she is fighting the temptation to commit serious sin, however, it is clear to her that the “menu” Catholicism she
has practiced during her adult life is inadequate. It has provided a means for her to remain Catholic, choosing which rules to adhere to and which to ignore according to personal standards of “palatability.” It has not, however, enabled her to develop the kind of deep spiritual life which would make Father Michael’s talk of sanctity and spiritual growth meaningful to her.

It seems likely that Father Michael appeals largely to Clare’s sense of responsibility to her husband and children rather than to her faith because her letters make it clear to him that any appeal to her in terms of her relationship with God would be futile. Clare is, spiritually speaking, a child. Her faith is based upon a conception of moral law similar to that of David Lodge’s “young people” whose metaphysic resembles a game called “Salvation, the object to get to Heaven and avoid Hell” (How Far Can You Go? 6). Her question to Father Michael might easily be framed as “how far can I go before the way back disappears behind me?” -- a question that, in the “less mechanistic” post Vatican Council era, Father Michael is unable to answer with certainty. Finally, Clare works out the practical implications of an affair with Henry to her family and decides that the urgency of her desire for Henry is worth the small risk she believes is involved. She sums up the situation pragmatically in a few crisp sentences:

I’m fairly sure it won’t come to [a “bust-up”]. Even if John does find out he won’t really care. Wounded pride, perhaps, but I don’t think he actually loves me much any more. He’s left me for his new career, and he won’t want a divorce now that he’s an MP (there are lots of Irish Catholics in his constituency!) so the children won’t suffer. In fact I feel I can square everyone except God and I can’t really bring myself to hold off H. just for someone most people don’t believe in anyway. (248)

What Clare requires of Father Michael is a new classification of the sin she is about to commit. Because, according to the flexible values of her social circle, her adulterous affair would constitute a reasonable response to her unhappiness, especially when the extenuating circumstances of John’s neglect and faithlessness are taken into account, Clare asks why the Church cannot give ground by reclassifying adultery as “a sort of middle-range sin” (242) in light of contemporary secular post-pill attitudes toward marital fidelity.
Clare is honest enough to recognize that it is not her relationship with her Church that she wants most to safeguard, but the comfortable compromise she has made between her allegiance to the Church and her desires and aspirations in the secular world. In the details of Clare's predicament Read emphasizes the "impossibility of serving two masters," as Martian E. Crowe phrases it (310). According to Read, Clare must make a choice. Thus, when Father Michael's arguments fail to deter her from adultery, Clare admits, rather bravely, that her allegiance lies with the world rather than with her faith. She tells the Jesuit: "I can't really bring myself to hold off H. just for someone most people don't believe in anyway. It seems ridiculous" (248).

Although the mediation of the Church, in the figure of Father Michael, fails Clare, her apparent repentance in the moments before she dies -- she traces with her finger in her shed blood what is perhaps a cross -- it seems to suggest that, despite her having "hung up on God," He does not desert her in her extremity. In this rather Greeneian ending, Read's polemical voice is muted while the events which follow Clare's violent death evoke much more convincingly than the apologist voice of Father Michael had done, a sense of the mercy of God and the power of His grace.

It seems prudent to pause, at this point, and to review briefly what Read has in mind when he uses the philosophical term, "moral relativism." In a recent work, Rom Harré and Michael Krausz define moral relativism as "the thesis that a principle is moral only in so far as it is mandatory, and principles are only mandatory relative to some particular moral system, and there is no universal moral system" (30). They distinguish between two types of relativism: "skepticism," in which "no point of view is privileged," and "permissiveness," in which "all points of view are equally privileged" (3). Such a philosophical thesis is in opposition to the tenets of orthodox Catholicism which contends that there are moral imperatives which are binding "in all contexts, at all times, and for all persons" (4), and that to profess to be Catholic is to embrace these universal moral imperatives as they are interpreted by and embodied in Church moral law, despite any inconvenience incurred. Catholics are called upon
to renounce choices that involve the violation of Church moral law, since such law is ordained by a wise and loving God who has at heart the interests of their immortal souls.

The notion of renunciation is central to Read’s understanding of Catholic moral law, and accordingly he takes issue with what he sees as the modern penchant for allowing a subjective (or relative) element to enter the moral equation. Once such elements are introduced, Read believes, the door is left wide open for weak and imperfect humanity to find excuses for indulgence in sinful acts, while adherence to Church law would lead them to renounce them. As an example of the perils of relativism, he cites David Lodge’s novel, Therapy, in which Lodge seems to suggest that “the compassion expressed in [a sexual act with a woman with the ugly disfigurement of a mastectomy scar] transcends any sin that might once have been considered implicit in the adulterous act” (Times 20). Similarly, the extenuating circumstances which Clare lists at length in an effort to persuade Father Michael to overlook, if not condone, her adultery are characteristic of the kind of subjectivism which Read considers to be the inherent danger posed by moral relativism. Once the absolute authority of the Church in matters of morals is compromised, in Read’s view, the temptation to act according to principles which are at best mere justifications for the indulgence of one’s desires becomes irresistible. The pages of his novels teem with characters who confuse “desire” with “entitlement” and who manage with little difficulty to deceive themselves that what they happen to want is morally justified by the specific circumstances of their particular case. John’s mistress, Paula, represents one extreme on the continuum of moral relativism when she justifies murder in the name of love.

Interestingly, Read toys with relativism when he suggests, in the characters of Clare, in A Married Man, and Lilian, the adulterous wife in The Professor’s Daughter, that adultery in a wife and mother is more damaging to the family unit than that of a husband and father. According to what Harré and Krausz term “moralities of honour . . . different moral demands are made on different classes of people, and everyone agrees on or accepts the total code” (161). It is worth reiterating that Read does not condone male infidelity by implying that the
moral demands made upon men should be less stringent since the results of male infidelity are less far reaching. However, with the introduction of the notion that female infidelity is more damaging in its consequences than that of male spouses, the way is left open for the sort of double standard which exists in several so-called Christian societies today, that as long as the wife stays in the kitchen and the nursery, the husband is free to philander at will without compromising marriage or family.

As Clare enumerates the reasons why she feels that her own particular circumstances justify an affair with Henry Mascall, her clear sightedness seems at odds with her childish grasp of religious faith. Marian Crowe has pointed out that Clare's "calculating . . . reductionist, sterile, and childish" approach to her faith "probably more closely approximates the experience of ordinary Christians" than do, for instance, Sarah's "intimate conversations with God" in Graham Greene's 1951 novel, The End of the Affair (324). Read consistently chooses to depict ordinary, "decent, well-intentioned people who suddenly find themselves up to their lily-white necks in evil" (Maddocks 92) rather than the rather exotic types favoured by Graham Greene. However, it may be that Clare's ordinariness at this stage is intended to contrast with her saintliness at the moment of her death, allowing Read to suggest the miraculous without recourse to the melodrama which has attracted criticism of his style in the past. Again, while this discordance between Clare's intelligence and her spiritual immaturity may represent a weakness in characterization, it could represent, instead, Read's attempt to show that neither good intentions nor a basic goodness of character are enough to protect the individual from grave error. It is clear that Clare's faith is important to her sense of her identity and that she wants to remain within the Church, but, despite her honesty and her ability to assess her own and her husband's motivation accurately and perceptively, Clare lacks the spiritual maturity that might have helped her to resist the temptation to use adultery as a panacea for her unhappiness. Her Catholicism seems to play a large part in her cultural identity, but a small part in her inner life. Clare's honest self-evaluation reveals that the most significant influence upon her choices are the secular values of her middle-class friends, and,
in the light of those values, to resist the pleasure and excitement that Henry represents would be, she believes, "ridiculous."

Clare had been hoping that, with Father Michael's help, she could remain within the Church and find a cure for her boredom and unhappiness with John in a relationship with Henry. When it becomes clear that no such compromise is possible, Clare tells Father Michael, "I've hung up on Him." Father Michael's theology of renunciation is incompatible with Clare's sense of her right to happiness here and now, especially since the risk of hurting those she loves is, in her estimation, small. In fact, so much out of tune is Clare with the Church's view of the need to mortify the flesh, she tells the Jesuit that she has "read a bit of The Imitation of Christ, but found it disgusting – like laying out your own corpse" (248). Liberal Catholic writers, such as Mary Gordon and David Lodge, would applaud such a response, seeing in it a sign of Clare's healthy attitude toward the body and its ability to give and receive pleasure. For Father Pearce and, perhaps, Read himself, however, it signifies a refusal to acknowledge the need to subjugate the body to the interests of the soul.

The disparity between Clare's obviously superior intelligence and her religious immaturity can be satisfactorily explained as Read's attempt to show that spiritual maturity has little to do with worldly wisdom or even what secular society deems to be "good," but a great deal to do with a lifetime of uncompromising adherence to Church law as a "habit of faith." However, Father Michael's endorsement of "the subordinate status of women" (Crowe 325) is more difficult to explain in terms of Read's polemical intent. In his last letter to Clare, Father Michael refers to what he calls "certain feminist fallacies" which he says Clare has allowed to "poison [her] attitude toward family life" (244). These erroneous arguments -- rather than John's behaviour -- Father Pearce implies, have led to Clare's "dissatisfaction with [her] role as wife and mother" (244). He concedes that Clare may well be more intelligent than her husband, but insists that this does not alter her obligations towards him. These obligations, Father Michael says,
may well mean that to some extent you must subordinate your will and personality to
his – an idea which I know is repugnant to most women nowadays – but nonetheless it
is the traditional teaching of the Church and is well founded in Scripture. In what
matters most – the soul – women are or can be as good as men: indeed one woman,
Our Lady, soars above all other men in virtue and holiness: but in this life on earth God
has given you a subordinate status and the rebellion against this ordering of His
creation in modern times is, in my opinion, the cause of much unhappiness.

I say this baldly because you have the gift of faith and through the sacraments
the Grace of God, all of which should enable you to see through the vanity of
contemporary intellectual fads. Certainly where men are subjugated by other men they
have a right to rebel: but if our state of subordination is ordained by God we must learn
in humility to accept it. (245)

This passage seems to encapsulate Father Pearce's argument in response to Clare's cry for
help and may represent Read's veiled criticism of members of the clergy who fail to engage
with the realities of contemporary life, responding instead to cries of help with the stale
formulas and hidebound doctrines of pre-conciliar Catholicism. Clare's unhappiness is
caused, Father Michael implies, by her refusal to accept the seemingly arbitrary decision,
which he attributes to God, to pronounce women inferior to men in all aspects of their
humanity except the soul, despite much scientific and empirical evidence to the contrary. All
argument against this so-called God-ordained hierarchy, whether theoretically or empirically
based, can be dismissed since both Scripture and Tradition support the subjugation of women.

However, Clare need not despair. According to Father Michael, if her intelligence has misled
her into adopting the tenets of false (feminist) doctrines, her faith and regular reception of the
sacraments will supply the grace which will enable her to suppress her own aspirations and to
"live through" her husband, despite his faithlessness and neglect.

To emphasize his point that Clare must make her life as homemaker and mother her
vocation, Father Michael goes on to provide an example which seems to play right into the
hands of those who criticize the Church for what they see as its anti-intellectualism. He writes:

You are married to John so to some extent you must live through him. God's gifts to
you of intelligence and perception shouldn't lead you to bemoan the drudgery of
domestic life. They should help you to understand that once you are married the
ordinary ministrations of a wife and mother become your vocation. Take pride in your
home. Do you remember how working-class women used to scrub the front steps of
their little terrace houses and then rub on a border with chalk? I often used to think of
them when visiting the slovenly homes of don's wives at Oxford, and wonder which
were the better women. (245)
Evidently, the well-meaning Father Michael is a man of the "cleanliness is next to Godliness" persuasion, a victim of the seductive power of over-simplifications, and a great believer in the accuracy of appearances.

Since Father Michael is singularly silent on the matter of John's contribution to the failure of the Strickland marriage, it is tempting to dismiss him as incurably sexist. However, it seems fair to give him the benefit of the doubt and to assume that if John were to ask his advice, Father Michael would urge John, too, to live at least to some extent, through his wife, as she ought through him, since mutual interest in each other's aspirations is a part of the marriage contract. However, it is clear that the priest gives scant attention to the fact that Clare's unhappiness is predominantly the result of her husband's neglect, and he can be faulted for failing to notice that what Clare had "bemoaned" was not so much the drudgery of her domestic life as her husband's lack of appreciation for her efforts.

Clare's domestic life is unbearable not just because it requires her to perform menial tasks which she feels are beneath a woman of her intelligence, but because the sacrifice she has made in the interests of her husband and children goes largely unappreciated. She implies that "living through him" ought not to mean the total suppression of her own personality and aspirations so that she becomes merely the means for his comfort and a mirror to his self-love. She tells the priest,

I'm stuck at home with the dirty breakfast dishes, the ironing, Woman's Hour, the children's tea and at the end of it all a self-important husband expecting a gin and tonic, a hot supper, admiration for the ego enhancing experiences of his day, commiseration for those who have taken the wind out of his sails[]. Then up we go: he clips his horrid, horny toenails, trims his corns with a razor blade; powders between his toes with anti-athlete's foot powder and then rolls over for a bit of sex. (243)

Clare's discontent is less with her role than with her husband's attitude toward her as she fulfills the responsibilities of that role. He no longer views her as a person with needs, feelings, and aspirations of her own, but thinks of her solely in terms of his own needs and rights, completely oblivious to the fact that their marriage requires of him an investment of love
for, and an awareness of the needs and aspirations of, his wife if she is to maintain her enthusiasm for their life together and for her familial role.

In pondering why Read should choose to provide his spokesman for Catholic orthodoxy with such obviously unpopular and outdated notions of women's roles, Marian E. Crowe suggests two possibilities:

On the one hand, the passage seems to be critical of priests who meet the serious moral dilemmas of Catholics with such a wooden and formulaic response. On the other hand, given the chaos that has been created by the more relaxed theology mentioned earlier [in Father Pearce's second letter], Read may be dead serious about the priest's point. (325)

As Crowe points out, it is difficult to know for certain whether or not Read is "seriously endorsing the subordinate status of women" (325) implicit in Father Michael's patriarchal view of marriage, but Clare's baffling wholesale acceptance of Father Michael's arguments suggests that the second of Crowe's suggestions is more likely to be correct. Clare's dogged insistence upon complete honesty when examining her own motives makes it seem unlikely that she would accept the Jesuit priest's explanations without subjecting them to the same rigorous examination. Furthermore, in her last letter, Clare claims in one breath, so to speak, to be ashamed of her "wantonness" and in another she rejects (in rejecting the ascetic premises of Thomas A Kempis) the notion that allowing herself the physical pleasure that Henry can give would be morally wrong. "I can't believe that goodness is meant to be so morbid and dull [she says of The Imitation of Christ]. I don't want to just hang around waiting to die" (248). What seems to be the case is that at this point in the narrative, the character of Clare is hijacked, as it were, by Read's fervent orthodoxy. When she says, quite uncharacteristically, "Your advice was good. I agree with everything you say – even about the role of women – but I'm afraid it's too late" (248 my emphasis), it is tempting to conclude that didactic intent has got the better of Read. As Crowe has noted, "in spite of Read's unquestionable ability to delineate the lives of skeptics and non-believers and even to articulate their arguments, he does not quite achieve a Bakhtinian dialogical play of voices
because all the other voices are subsumed into the Catholic one" (327). Perhaps this is what
has happened to the voice of sincere dissent Clare has led the reader to expect of her.

A further inconsistency in the novel lies in Read’s depiction of the ontological basis of
sexual sin. As Crowe has noted, Read has clearly chosen to write psychomachia, a genre in
which “his characters’ psyches are a battleground for a contest between the vices and virtues,
between the lure of worldly delights and the insistent claims of a transcendent God” (309), but
it is unclear what Read takes to be the locus and nature of the vice which Clare’s desire to
commit adultery represents. He seems to oscillate between the view that sexual sin is the
result of giving in to the “purely physical instinct” characterized as lust, and the notion that the
unhappy and dissatisfied seek in adultery the love and affirmation which ought properly to be
the product of the married state. Father Michael tells Clare, for instance, that her “compulsion
[to succumb to Henry’s seductive ploys] is as much psychological as sexual – a need to
escape from what [she] see[s] as the drab confines of [her] domestic life” (244). Even John’s
philandering is characterized less as a function of unbridled lust than as an attempt to regain a
sense of himself as a man with a promising future after an undistinguished past.

The seeming incongruity between Read’s theology and his sociology may well have its
origin in the keen interest in socialism that Read inherited from his father. Perhaps, on an
unconscious level, Read has never reconciled his gut belief in the social roots of human
unhappiness, which his early flirtation with Communism instilled in him, with the notion that
has its roots in the ancient Church, that the sins of the flesh are mainly the result of
uncontrolled animal lust. This is not to say that the position of the Church is irreconcilable with
modern notions of human motivation and desire, but merely to point out that in Read’s fiction
the discrepancy remains unresolved and seemingly unrecognized. Perhaps he lacks the
objectivity that would provide a more distanced view of the issues he chooses to explore in his
fiction. At one point, Clare is urged by Father Michael to rise above “purely physical instincts”
which make her vulnerable to Henry and at another she is informed that her discontent rather
than her sexual appetite are at the root of her problem. It may be that Read’s portrayal of the
Jesuit as a representative of what might be considered the institutional Church's arid anachronistic approach might be construed as evidence of Read's ability to be objective despite the fact that he has tied himself to the traditionalist Church. Read's portrayal of Father Michael's inability to address, in terms that she will understand, the realities of Clare's life in the world, may be intended to show that Read has no illusions about some aspects of the institutional Church, including its bleaker prospects. If this interpretation is correct, then Read's faith is less uncritically orthodox than his lapses into didacticism would make it seem, if he believes the Church unable, as Father Michael is unable, to mediate the grace of reconciliation between God and the individual. According to this view, Clare's apparent act of repentance at the moment she lies dying seems to speak of a God who requires no mediating agent, but whose grace can redeem the fallen soul, as Graham Greene has argued, between the stirrup and the ground. I think it most likely, however, in view of Clare's piecemeal acceptance of Father Michael's reactionary notions of womanhood, that Read intends the reader to see in Clare at the moment of her death, a woman who, in her extremity, turns back to the "truths" embodied in Father Michael's letters, truths that she had acknowledged but had been unable to accept.

On balance -- although it is a closely fought battle -- Read's "imaginative sympathy" (Flynn 631) wins out over the traditional notions of human sexual depravity which are the legacy of the Church Fathers, despite the fact that, as Crowe has observed, "a turn toward conversion for a Read protagonist inevitably includes abhorrence of sexual excess" (312). Read's depiction of Clare as a woman driven to adultery by the neglect of her husband and the false counsel of those who preach "feminist fallacies" shows him to have a keen appreciation of the complicated motives, predominantly non-sexual, behind human acts of sexual betrayal. His portrayal of John's lover, Paula, too, provides the picture of a woman whose motivation in sleeping with another woman's husband has little to do with lust. Indeed she seems to dislike the sex act. Paula sees sexual activity as a weapon of conquest, and if conquest is not possible, as a means of sharing male power. The affair between John and Paula is
characterized as a power contest between two people who use sex as a means to subdue and dominate each other. Paula has, according to an acquaintance, predator-like "poisoned points to her tits and teeth" (110), and when she initiates sex with John she "lies like a leech on top of him" (197). Yet when John satisfies his compulsion to "[establish] domain over this scraggy heiress by intermittently ejaculating into the deepest recesses of her body" (173) she responds in a "mechanical and conscientious" manner and "seem [s], as it were, to grit her teeth" as if the sex act were an unpleasant but necessary part of "hitching oneself to . . . some rising star" (122). Paula believes that, as a woman, she can enjoy political power only vicariously, as the partner of a male politician. Thus, it is patently clear that lust has played next to no part at all in Paula's decision to embark upon an affair with John.

It seems clear, then, that raw and unrestrained lust is most often the least important of motives when Read's characters succumb to the temptation to commit what the Church characterizes as sexual sin. Yet, even as the underlying psycho-social reasons for their behaviour are delineated in Read's narrative, his characters judge their own behaviour according to traditional norms. It seems that, while ignoring or rejecting traditional standards of sexual behaviour, they often use unrestrained sexual activity as a means of "acting out" an inner sense that they are despicable or depraved. Louisa, the professor's daughter, and Hilary, the hero of Read's 1973 novel, The Upstart, are prime examples of characters who pay lip service to liberal views of human sexuality yet seem to use sexual excess as an outward sign of an inner malaise they experience as a sense of shame and self-hatred. Their sexual depravity becomes a kind of behavioural "scarlet letter" designed to draw attention to an inner sickness which cannot easily be articulated. The ambivalence of these characters about the meaning and origins of sexual promiscuity can be traced to a disjunction between Read's conservative Catholicism and his socialist ideology. On the one hand, Read's orthodoxy requires that he ascribe sexual sin to an unrestrained indulgence of "animal appetite," which ought properly to be used only within the sacred bond of matrimony if the soul is to grow in holiness. On the other, Read's socialist ideology does not allow him to ignore the role that
society and societal structures, such as the dysfunctional family, play in promoting unhealthy and possibly destructive sexual behaviour. Part of the problem is that, despite the seemingly vast gap between secular and religious values at this point in the late twentieth century, the notion that promiscuity, especially in women, is a clear sign of depravity dies hard. Indeed, so deep-seated is this notion that it seems to belong to what Jung has called our collective unconscious, or race memory. That promiscuity is seen as particularly disgraceful in a woman is perhaps a lingering legacy of the old fear prevalent before the advent of reliable contraceptive methods, that a man could not be sure, if his partner was promiscuous, that the children she bore him were really his. While encouraging liberal moral notions of human behaviour, secular society has not yet managed to free itself of the symbols and stereotypes of a less liberal age.

Read seems to suggest, as Marian Crowe has noted, “that little failures in self-control often initiate a slipping into sexual license” (311) and he argues, furthermore that “sexual laxity betokens a weakening of moral fiber, which has serious destructive ramifications” (311-2). However, there is another important aspect to the battle between virtue and vice being waged in the souls of Read’s characters, one that has less to do with Read’s theology than with his characters' psychological make up and the social influences of their lives. While, unquestionably, they succumb to temptation directed toward their often poorly defended front, the “physical instincts,” Read explores with insight and compassion what happens when, as a result of what they often own as sexual sin, an individual develops a self-hatred which he or she cannot contain and which he or she displays to the world in a series of degrading acts. In The Professor’s Daughter for example, Read presents in the character of Louisa Rutledge a young woman whose life is ruined by a series of poor moral choices (most of which pertain to sexual behaviour) but who, as a result of her behaviour, turns upon her own body in a ferocious attempt to destroy what she sees as the instrument of her betrayal and her unhappiness. Louisa reminds the reader of Isabel, in Mary Gordon’s Final Payments, who also turned upon her own body when she felt it had led her into sexual sin. The damage
Isabel inflicts upon her body by means of over-eating and neglect, Louisa inflicts upon herself by entering indiscriminately into sexual liaisons with strangers. In the character of Louisa Rutledge, Read explores the terrible consequences which ensue when family dysfunction, societal breakdown, and the entrenched prejudices which are the remnants of secular society's religious past combine in an evil force which threatens to destroy the fragile psyche of a vulnerable, unhappy young woman.

Read's 1971 novel, The Professor's Daughter, provides excellent material for a study of the Catholic novel in late twentieth century Britain and America in that it takes a detached look at American society from the point of view of an English Catholic of orthodox views. In a later chapter, to complement the picture, I shall explore several novels by an American Catholic novelist who has chosen for her focus the lives of English Catholics. Unlike the novel A Married Man, in which the Church has a strong central mediating presence in the character of the Jesuit, Father Michael Pearce, the institutional Church is peripheral in The Professor's Daughter, although as in all Read's fiction, Catholicism is the informing principle. Here, Read's social concerns take centre stage and, in Marian Crowe's words, "Read goes so far as to suggest that sexual misbehavior is so interwoven with the texture of contemporary life that the cause-effect relationship works both ways" (313). In The Professor's Daughter, "flawed social and political liberalism" are the breeding ground for moral depravity. In the case of Louisa, the professor's daughter, however, sexual depravity is both the result of these social ills and the means by which Louisa attempts to annihilate her hated self.

The Professor's Daughter begins in medias res with a vivid depiction of what Read believes can be the result when the "flawed pattern" of American liberalism begins to disintegrate and, as Philip Flynn puts it, "personal failings overshadow public virtue" (626). In a journalistic narrative style which provides a distancing of the narrator and a means of avoiding the melodrama of which he is frequently accused, Read gives an account of the Professor's daughter's solicitation of a scruffy middle-aged stranger whom she approaches on Boston Common, their loveless sexual union in her apartment, and her subsequent suicide.
attempt. The account appalls because Read is at pains to describe both Louisa and her customer in a way that shows that, although the customer fits the stereotype of a man who might be expected to pay for sex, Louisa does not appear to be the kind of girl who would sell it. Here Read deliberately reverses the traditional stereotype of the whore to underscore the idea that evil does not necessarily have a hardened face. Louisa's slight body is dressed in the childish garb of a schoolgirl, "a brown coat . . . a yellow woollen jersey which showed beneath her neck. . . . and russet coloured stockings" (2). In contrast to Louisa's look of schoolgirl innocence, the man she propositions and takes to her room for sex is repulsive by any standards:

From any proximity he would have seemed unattractive, for his nose was flat and his lips were thick and the skin of his cheeks was clogged and pitted. . . . When a movement of his head allowed his fat neck to separate from the collar of his shirt, there could be seen the scum that had passed from the one to the other: and the bright tie he wore was darkened at its knot by the filth of the fingers that had tied it. (2)

The brief sexual coupling for which the man lowers "his trousers as he would to defecate" (3) leaves the girl (whom we later learn is named Louisa) in tears and the man seemingly bewildered by her grief. Thus, this strange scenario sets up the mystery which Read sets out, in the novel to explain -- how a young woman, with all the advantages of a wealthy American middle-class home, has become "a suicidal nymphomaniac" (Flynn 626) who searches the streets "to have herself besmirched and split and sated by any man she [can] find" (The Professor's Daughter 127).

By the novel's halfway mark, the reader arrives at the point at which the story began, the moment when Louisa walked "the streets of Boston until she saw a man she thought might meet her [sexual] needs" (128). The subsequent chapters of the first half of the novel provide first a family history and then an account of the events which have led Louisa, the daughter of a wealthy and highly respected Harvard professor, to the point where she compulsively seeks out strangers for sexual liaisons. The symptoms of the social and familial breakdown which culminate in Louisa's attempt to end her life by jumping from her apartment window are clearly visible in Read's account of her father's early life and her parents' courtship. Both during and
after the Second World War, Louisa's father, Henry Rutledge, had pursued an education which he hoped would equip him to "serve the world" (24). His experience at Oxford University had reinforced his belief that the way of the future lay in "Americanism" rather than in the "drab reform[s]" and "dry dugs" of the old world. He and his friend, Bill McLaughin, who is destined to become a congressman and the lover of Henry's wife, come back home "fervently optimistic about America" and determined to devote themselves to spreading the gospel of "Americanism" since it is "the one remaining option...an example to the world – not just of prosperity but of decency, efficiency and justice" (25).

Read's description of the early years of the Rutledge marriage reveals a couple whose notion of "American decency" is superficial at best. Together, they live an outwardly irreproachable life, yet neither is faithful to the other. According to the norms of the privileged class to which they belong, "decency" seems merely to be a synonym for "discretion." Despite the fact that their marital infidelity does not, on the surface, harm the integrity of their family, such behaviour, from Read's point of view, represents "the thin edge of the wedge" which will later drive them apart. Henry's vague notions of "American decency" and lack of a personal code of ethics more substantial than to behave as an American gentleman ought, cannot sustain him when he is confronted with the moral disintegration of his daughters and the political assassination plotted by his students. Clearly, Henry's and Lilian's lack of firm convictions about the meaning and conduct of married life leads inexorably to the failure of their marriage and to the subsequent unhappiness and disorder in the lives of their daughters, despite the wealth and advantages which might have been expected to provide for them happy and carefree lives.

Henry had been attracted not only by Lilian's beautiful manner and appearance but by the fact that she shared his political ideals. She recognizes, as he does, that wealth and status come with the responsibility to serve those who are less fortunate. However, when their first sexual encounter had resulted in Lilian's pregnancy, Lilian had felt constrained to lay aside her ambitions and become Henry's wife. Her resentment at the curtailment of her own political
ambition is evident in her coldness toward her eldest daughter, Louisa, and in her choice of Bill McLaughlin, a man who has nothing to recommend him as a lover apart from the ability to provide Lilian with the heady sense of being close to a source of power. During their first date, Henry had remarked that "the most powerful women in history . . . have been the mistresses of kings" (28), thus unconsciously foreshadowing the shape of things to come. Near the end of the novel when, unbeknown to Lilian, Henry has been killed in an attempt to save Bill's life, Lilian recognizes, unfortunately too late, the damage that her infidelity, although discreetly conducted, has caused in the lives of the four members of her family. She finds the strength of character to leave Bill, whose diabolical pragmatism in matters of sexual intrigue is reminiscent of Henry Mascall, Read's villain in *A Married Man*.

Henry, too, has been casually unfaithful during the early years of his marriage to Lilian, yet, without actually condoning Henry's faithlessness, Read clearly intends to show that Lilian's adultery has far more serious consequences than her husband's. No space is given to Lilian's reactions to her husband's extra-marital affairs. We are not even told whether or not she is aware of them, although rumours had been rife among their university friends. Henry's reactions, however -- his "baffling, incomprehensible sorrow" -- are copiously displayed. His disappointment at his wife's infidelity and disillusion with his marriage cause Henry to withdraw from Lilian like a wounded animal and to seek solace in his eldest daughter, dangerously investing in his relationship with Louisa emotions which had previously been directed toward his wife.

Henry and Lilian drift further and further apart, each finding fulfillment in other relationships, Lilian with Senator McLaughlin and Henry with his daughter, Louisa. Lilian's resentment grows toward the daughter who, in her accidental conception, had ended Lilian's hopes for a career in politics, and now usurps the spousal affection which was previously hers. Louisa, for her part, innocently basks in the sunshine of her father's love and admiration. At this stage in her young life, the strong bond she shares with her father provides Louisa with the confidence and poise that earn her the envy and admiration of her friends. The sixteen
year old Louisa is flattered by her father's admiration for her developing beauty, although she is innocently unaware that the relationship which he has built up between them provides compensation for her father for the mutual love and physical closeness that is missing in his marriage. She unwittingly encourages Henry's unhealthy reliance upon her admiration which ought by rights to come from his wife by responding to him coquettishly in an effort to seem grown up, but without fully understanding her own behaviour. Henry is also unaware of the danger to which the investment of his romantic feelings in his daughter might lead, but Lilian's resentment of their closeness seems to provide her with greater insight than Henry can achieve at this point in the unfolding events. As Lilian stares at "Lautrec's depiction of a Parisian whore" hanging above the fireplace while coldly ordering Louisa to pick up her bag (which, in her eagerness to wait on her father with his evening cocktail, she had thrown carelessly on the floor) the attentive reader gains a shadowy glimpse of the crisis to come.

Soon after this foreshadowing confrontation between mother and daughter, Louisa and her father leave for Paris where Henry is to give a conference paper. After the conference, at which the professor's daughter receives many admiring glances and comments which force him to recognize, uncomfortably, the inappropriate nature of his own feelings toward her, father and daughter leave for a tour of Africa. Far from the familiar moral props of middle-class American society, Henry is forced to confront, like the character Kurtz, in Joseph Conrad's novel, Heart of Darkness, his own dark heart in the form of a strongly incestuous impulse toward his daughter. Appalled by his incestuous urge, Henry resolves "to become more the father and less the lover" (81). Louisa, however, had been half sleep, unaware and therefore unaffected by her father's struggle against the urge to "touch in the dark the cavities of her frame" (76), but she is deeply harmed by his sudden coldness and physical withdrawal. Louisa is confused by Henry's sudden change from "spoiling father" to authoritative parent and finds the reversal difficult to accept. Oblivious to the "feelings of remorse and self-disgust" (76) which precipitate Henry's abrupt change, Louisa has no alternative but to locate the problem in herself. Thereafter
their friendliness deteriorated — since her elegant body was always there before his eyes, in summer frocks and night-dress, her legs casually apart, her bosom in a T-shirt, inflicting a pain as real and severe on the father as any knife or club or hot iron; and hurting him, too, in his mind, where the ordinary, decent American was humiliated by his shaming desire for his own child. (81)

Mystified by the change in her father, Louisa experiences the rejection which will so stain the image she has of herself that, eventually, she will reject herself as her father had seemed to do.

During their African journey, Louisa's disenchantment with her father is compounded by her partial realization that her father's values are less authentic than she had trustingly supposed. She has grown up in a home in which the altruistic values of liberalism are propounded daily at the meal table. Yet in Africa, the distance Henry puts between them gives Louisa the opportunity to view her father and his capitalist values with greater objectivity. She notices a discrepancy between his professed altruism and his impatience with the beggars they encounter in the Ethiopian town of Lalibela. Most damaging to their relationship, and therefore to Louisa's subsequent development, is the juxtaposition of the two events: Louisa's recognition of the disparity between her father's professed beliefs and his actions at the very moment when he curtails the flirtatiousness which she had so innocently — and he so guiltily — enjoyed.

Louisa continues to examine her parents' values with the naïve idealism of youth, and finds them sadly wanting. The discovery of her parents' hypocrisy and the hurt she feels at her father's sudden withdrawal from her results in a wholesale rejection of the middle-class values which form the foundation of her parents' comfortable middle-class lives. She rejects her parents' choice of Radcliffe College, choosing instead Berkeley, the Californian school that was, in the 1960s, at the centre of the West Coast hippie movement. In California, Louisa embarks upon a relationship with a young hippie college drop out called Jason Jones, whose appearance, lifestyle, and opinions make him so much the opposite of her father that it is clear that these factors constitute his major appeal for her. Jason is by most standards an unattractive young man. At their first meeting, his "clothes were dirty and his hair was long.
He wore leather trousers, stiff with dirt, a moustache, and a paisley-patterned shirt" (95). In Louisa's eyes, however, his vast difference from the father who had seemed to reject her makes him not only interesting, but also highly attractive. He teaches Louisa to smoke pot and soon has her cooking his meals for him while he lounges on the mattress that serves as his bed. Despite having rejected the values of his own middle-American parents, Jason's revolutionary beliefs do not discourage him from taking advantage of Louisa's willingness to serve as an unpaid housemaid. Jason pays much lip service to his revolutionary ideals, but is otherwise quite content to do nothing while Louisa waits upon his needs. Even the besotted Louisa notices that his penchant for pontification leaves little time for action (98). For Louisa, determined as she is to throw off what she sees as the false values of her middle-class inheritance, Jason's grubby hovel, his dirty, malodorous body, and the cynical attitude which is his excuse for his idleness are the glorious manifesto of an ideology that is desirable just because it is as far as can be from her father's.

Louisa marries Jason, much to the chagrin of her father, who weeps on her wedding day. The marriage is, however, predictably short-lived. Jason's alternative value system allows him freely to indulge his sexual appetite but does not require him to take responsibility for the results of his actions. Not only has he renounced "ownership," he has also renounced personal responsibility. "Who in hell wants a baby?" he shouts, when Louisa announces her pregnancy. The crisis forces to the surface the misanthropy that underlies Jason's rebellion like a disease. He tells Louisa that, far from wanting a child, he does not want anyone (116). Shortly after this outburst, Jason passes Louisa to his friend and "guru," Ned Rampton, a physically repulsive character whose superficial philosophy provides Jason with an explanation for his unhappiness and a justification for the hours that he spends "navel-gazing." Louisa agrees to sleep with her husband's friend for the same reason that Felicitas, in Mary Gordon's novel of the "liberated 70s," The Company of Women, had agreed to sleep with men other than her professor-lover. Both women want desperately to please the men they love and whose rhetoric of selfishness they have mistaken for liberated views. When, in a desperate
attempt to rid himself of the responsibility of relationship, Jason tells Louisa, "you've got your body. You gave it to me: now let Ned have it for a time" (121), she obeys. Ned is another of Read's diabolical figures whose familiar trade marks are sexual manipulation and debauchery, a man bent on manipulating the innocent, such as Louisa, and the lost, such as Jason. Ned explains to Louisa that Jason has "had a personality foisted onto him by a corrupt society, a personality which was not 'him'" (119). The solution, in Ned's view, is for Jason to take the hallucinogen, lysergic acid diethylamide, in order to "free his true self from its artificial form" (119). With Ned's help, Louisa procures an abortion in Mexico — "money...that's all it needs" (124) — and moves in with Ned. Her liberation, under Ned's tutelage, from "the repression we have in us all after two thousand years of Christianity" involves an "education in Hindu copulation" (123) taken from The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana. The result of Louisa's education is a severe case of sexual addiction which leads via a series of casual sexual encounters to the moment when she throws herself from her apartment window in a desperate attempt to end her torment.

The second half of the novel traces Louisa's attempt to rebuild her life and her father's growing recognition of the inadequacies of the principles on which he has based his life. Louisa becomes involved in the revolutionary activities of a group of her father's graduate students who are led by a middle-aged priest who has substituted the "material," in the form of revolutionary action, for the "spiritual." He had once thought that "the spiritual" was his destiny, but as the spiritual had grown "less and less real," revolution became, for Father Alan Gray, "the only reality" (188). It must be said that while his depiction of Henry's brush with the evil of incest on his African journey with Louisa is both sensitive and convincing, Read seems to be out of his depth when creating characters capable of planning a "politically significant assassination" in order to "initiate revolution in [America]" (203). Despite the gravity of their plan, the conspirators conduct themselves in a manner less like ruthless revolutionaries than like a group of school children planning a prank. Henry reflects that his daughter and her friends are "mixed up in some political adventure of an extreme sort" (196 my emphasis) and,
when told by the conspirators of the exact nature of the plot -- the assassination of Senator Bill McLaughlin -- Henry responds by fondly imagining his students as "the Lenins and Trotskys of the United States" with his daughter playing the part of "Rosa Luxemburg, or La Pasionaria" (197). Louisa, for her part, tells her co-conspirators, rather improbably, that her father will not try to warn McLaughlin of his danger because he dislikes the Senator.

Louisa's professed motive for joining the plot to kill a close friend of her parents is that, despite having no personal reason for wanting a revolution since she enjoys an affluent lifestyle as the daughter of a prominent and respected member of the American establishment, she wants to be "unselfish for the first time in [her] life" (178). Finally, however, Louisa plays only a minor role in the assassination attempt -- that of an insider who can discover the proposed movements of the Senator without arousing suspicion. Louisa falls in love with Julius Tate, a member of the revolutionary group and, with his love, manages to cure herself of her sexual addiction and of her unhappiness. As Louisa and Julius unite in helping Laura, Louisa's younger sister, to break away from the destructive drug culture in which she has become involved, their love for each other develops. Julius' steady affection enables Louisa to begin her own healing. Although she and her lover do not wait until their wedding night to consummate their love, Julius and Louisa make love for the first time believing that their act of love constitutes a sign of their deep and lasting commitment to each other.

Julius, it turns out, is not a revolutionary at all. He is a spy reporting to his uncle, who is an assistant director of the FBI, the activities of student radicals in exchange for his school fees and in gratitude for his uncle's guardianship. During the botched assassination attempt, Henry is shot and the revolutionary priest is killed by a bullet from his own gun. As the novel ends, those of the group who are left, including Louisa, her younger sister, Laura, and Julius, abandon radical politics to "give the system one final chance" (241). They throw in their lot with Eugene McCarthy, a man whom, according to Philip Flynn, Read believes "most poignantly confused the roles of saint and hero in the 1960s" (626).
While *The Professor's daughter* is Read's fictional critique of East Coast [American] liberalism, the novel also focuses upon a perennial concern for Read, the breakdown of the family which he believes is due to widespread acceptance of the moral relativism which in secular society puts immediate gratification ahead of the far-sighted [essentially Catholic] values of restraint and renunciation that focus upon eternal rather than temporal happiness. Just as Clare, in *A Married Man*, provides a portrait of her marriage in her epistolary exchange with Father Michael, discovered by her husband only after her violent death, Henry leaves behind, in a partially completed treatise on marriage, a testimony to the new and better husband and father he had been in the process of becoming. This fragment perhaps also encapsulates Read's antidote to the malaise of modern society as portrayed in the life of the Rutledge family. Henry writes:

> A family will always be the basic unit of society. Neither political revolution nor changes in the status of women will alter this. Our attitudes towards the community at large are learnt in the intimacy of the family, and happiness within the family is the source of optimism and accord in the citizens it provides. Since this happiness must come from the parents, the success and permanency of love between husband and wife becomes all-important for a nation of millions. This love itself may have to combat the corrupt values of a degenerate society: but in every man and woman there is an impulse to idealism in love. Thus society can renew itself with each union. . . . (240)

Had Henry and Lilian conducted their married life together according to this principle, Read implies, Louisa and her sister might have been spared much confusion, needless rebellion, and unhappiness.

The novel's title suggests that Louisa is to be understood in terms of her relationship with her professor father and, perhaps, as a victim of what is popularly called the generation gap. Had Louisa been the product of an economically impoverished background, or the child of a single parent, her problem might have been construed as the results of a disadvantaged childhood. However, Read is careful to ensure that no socio-economic factors can be attributed to Louisa's case. She has grown up in a privileged two-parent family home, surrounded by costly works of art. Yet, despite their wealth, Lilian and Henry cannot be
accused of preparing the way for delinquency by spoiling their children: they have been careful to avoid overindulgence. The Rutledges

had been rich on both sides for some time, and they had developed, through the generations, a puritanical philosophy of what should, or should not, be done with money. Louisa and Laura had never had anything that the other children they mixed with did not have: and if those things they did possess – notably the clothes they wore – were of a better quality and finer style, then that again was not something of which they were particularly aware. (53-4)

Thus, a picture emerges which, on the surface, shows a gracious and harmonious home in which, it might be expected, the two privileged daughters of a rich and famous university professor would pass a charmed and uneventful childhood. However, in the Rutledge home, so carefully arranged that all the females have names beginning with the letter L, things are not as they initially appear. Despite appearing to epitomize the perfect middle-class family, as Lilian remarks, their “home’s bad for everyone” (12).

The first indication that Louisa’s problem might have something to do with her relationship with her parents is hinted at in the widely disparate attitudes shown toward her by each of her parents. When, after Louisa’s suicide attempt, Lilian asks after Louisa in a most unmotherly manner with her question, “well, how’s the little brat?” and pleads with her husband, “for God’s sake Harry, let’s not pretend [that the situation is not serious]” (11), Henry resorts to coy understatements in his determination to maintain the fiction that Louisa “may have one or two beaux... but... she isn’t promiscuous” (12). Perhaps with the harsh honesty that alcohol often promotes, Lilian is giving vent to a mixture of hatred and despair. In speaking of Louisa to her husband as “your little darling,” she reveals her jealousy of her daughter as the recipient of Henry’s love and attention, a devotion which she has forfeited, we learn later, through taking as her lover her husband’s closest friend. While Lilian’s bitterness at the failure of their marriage is evident in her self-destructive overuse of alcohol, however, it is clear that of the two, Lilian is the partner most able and ready to confront the problem honestly. In his review of the novel, Melvin Maddocks argues wittily that Read’s “specialty is “exposing false innocents” (W3). In The Professor’s Daughter, the job is allotted to Lilian who
tries both to expose both Henry’s false innocence with regard to the real condition of his daughter and his willed ignorance of his own part in her “fall.” To the policeman who visits them after Louisa’s attempted suicide she says, “it’s only fair to tell you officer...that we haven’t been on very good terms with our daughter recently. . . . the generation gap, you know” (17-18). However, as she goes on to say, “with well-modulated touches of irony and complicity in her voice” (18), that she and Henry “blame themselves” (18) for Louisa’s problems, the reader receives the impression that she is speaking to her husband rather than to the detective, implying by her tone that the opposite is true. Henry does not blame himself because he refuses to view Louisa’s plight as anything more serious than “a bit of a fall” (10).

Perhaps Lilian’s experience of extra-marital sex with Bill McLaughlin provides her with the ability to recognize Louisa’s sexual addiction. Like Louisa, Lilian has mistaken lust for love, as her comment to Bill McLaughlin makes obvious. “I need you...very much. Every now and then,” she tells him, in a night stolen from their spouses at Bill’s Vermont cabin, “I guess that means I love you” (181). Unlike her husband, who has been capable, it seems, of conducting affairs outside his marriage without damaging the marital bond he shares with Lilian, she, on her part, seems to be divided in her affections. Perhaps this is what Clare means when, in her letter to Father Michael she admits that “it’s different for men” (A Married Man 238). Again, while Read does not suggest that adultery in a husband is less culpable because a man can more readily enter into a sexual relationship without becoming emotionally attached to his lover and thereby threatening his marriage, in the characters of Clare and Lilian, he does seem to imply that spousal infidelity is more wounding for the betrayed husband than for the betrayed wife since, in the case of the husband, male pride is involved. Henry reacts to his cuckolding by investing his wounded feelings in an inappropriately close relationship with a less powerful and therefore less threatening female: his teenaged daughter. However, with Henry’s denial, the problems within the Rutledge marriage remain unacknowledged and, therefore, unaddressed. The relationship continues, in Philip Flynn’s words, as “a guilty compromise” (626).
It seems probable that Henry's reluctance to confront the truth about Louisa is a function of the fact that he has never come to terms with his own ambivalent feelings toward her, in particular, his difficulty in accepting that the event which took place before Louisa's desperate attempt on her own life constituted anything less than rape: "But he must have forced his way into her apartment" he tells the detective, "he's middle-aged and married" (17). In view of his own extra-marital liaisons, it is hardly likely that Henry is naïve enough not to know that middle-aged men frequently have affairs with "liberated" young women. Henry's difficulty, therefore, seems to stem from the fact that his daughter has chosen to have sexual relations with a man like himself. Perhaps, too, he is half aware that behind Louisa's seemingly incomprehensible behaviour may be the wish to punish her father for withdrawing his "peerlike intimacy" from her at a time when, as an adolescent, she was most vulnerable to psychic hurt. In Read's view, it seems, Lilian can perhaps be held more accountable than her husband for the breakdown of their marriage, since her serious and long-lasting affair rather than Henry's "casual infidelities" have undermined their bond. Henry deserves greater blame, however, for the tragedy which befalls their daughter since he had made her a substitute for his estranged wife and, then, realizing the incestuous nature of his feelings, had withdrawn his affection without explanation. For Read, "the flawed social and political liberalism" which Henry espouses weakens him morally and provides the "fertile breeding ground for such depravity" as Louisa's behaviour represents (Crowe 313). Sexual sin, Read implies -- even if of the seemingly insignificant kind of which Henry is guilty -- may lead on to serious sin, perhaps even to sexual desire for one's own child. By maintaining a willed and willful innocence, Henry has enabled serious sin to gain a hold on the family for which, in Read's view, as the husband, Henry has moral responsibility.

Read's portrayal of Louisa, the object of Henry's incestuous desire, is reminiscent of Nabokov's Lolita, although at sixteen, she is rather old for the role. In the section of the novel which deals with Louisa's childhood, she is first glimpsed wearing "a blue frock with a lace collar and [with] her delicate legs covered with white stockings" (46) and devouring a banana
split with the carelessness of one who need not worry about gaining weight. Leaving the
friends she clearly finds boring and juvenile, Louisa picks up her father, a companion far
worthier of her, from his office: "He . . . smiled at Louisa – another link in the chain of smiles
with which her life was bound – but this link was certainly the strongest, since there was no
defERENCE in it nor any of the older man's reserved expression for his child. It was a smile of
recognition and complicity, and it was returned" (48). Louisa's smile soon disappears,
however, when, on their reaching home, her mother asks her to put away her bag before fixing
her father's evening cocktail. At this, Louisa is transformed into a foot-stamping, scowling
child. Once Louisa and her father are embarked on their journey together, however, and her
cold and scolding mother is no longer present, Louisa again becomes the pretty and smiling
companion of the adoring older man who happens also to be her father. She enjoys Henry's
admiration without understanding its darker implications, all the while unconsciously inflaming
his desire by uninhibitedly displaying her young and beautiful body in flimsy underwear.

Once back in America, Henry is able to suppress the memory of the incestuous desire
that had forced him, in Africa, to examine the foundations of his life principles. At home he
becomes again "a moral man who [can] talk of America's commitment to freedom around the
world" (90). To Louisa, however, their journey together has resulted in a disillusion with her
beloved father so powerful that it will lead her almost to her death. The fact that Henry's
seeming rejection of her comes at the time when she first sees through his self-serving
liberalism leads Louisa not only to accept the first alternative political ideology she comes
across, but to accept also the attentions of the first man to take an interest in her body, simply
because he is quite unlike her father. While her rejection of her father's social and political
ideology is conscious, her rejection of all that he stands for as a male seems to be an
unconscious reflex essential to the protection of the blossoming sense of herself as a woman
that her father's sudden coldness toward her has caused to falter. Furthermore, had Louisa
been a less sheltered and therefore more worldly-wise young woman, she might have
recognized Jason Jones for the troubled young man he clearly is. His attraction lies in his
stark difference from her parents whom she now finds “pretty damn phoney” (105), and she fails to see that he is as “phoney” as they are in that he uses his professed beliefs to justify his life of idleness. Louisa is as happy to serve her new love, however, as she had been to serve her father. With the ladder of her parent’s values and her father’s special love kicked out from under her, Louisa is ready to fall for anything. Thus, she embraces both Jason’s politics and his lifestyle in her determination to leave behind the legacy of her parents’ “flawed” liberalism.

Louisa soon discovers, however, that sexual license leads not to freedom but to slavery. As a result of Ned’s instruction in sexual “gymnastics” she becomes a sex addict, so unable to control her sexual urges that she roams the streets looking for men with whom she can satisfy the craving of her body for sexual stimulation. That Read chooses to portray Louisa with a full-blown case of sexual addiction rather than as a promiscuous young woman serves to emphasize the importance he places upon sexual sin in the life of the individual at some cost to the novel’s realism. Unfortunately, it also leaves Read wide open to accusations that his novels are melodramatic. Louisa’s “sudden gusts of lust” (142) are described in vague rather than discreet terms, giving the impression that her illness serves to drive home a theological message rather than because it is a logical consequence of Louisa’s experience. In fact, by attributing Louisa’s promiscuity and subsequent suicide attempt to a recognized disease, Read tends to undermine the point which other parts of the novel make clear it is his wish to establish, that behaviour such as Louisa’s is the result of the moral rot which underlies American Liberal society. As in A Married Man, but this time in the character of Louisa, Read’s socialism and his theology seem to collide with each other when they might have coalesced. She is at once a “victim of society” and the victim of a psychiatric illness which many experts consider to be, like alcoholism, a disease of biological origin rather than a personal moral failure or disorder which has its roots in social decline. While a case can be made that Louisa’s extreme form of promiscuity is an instance of what Maddocks sees as Read “clouding his own novelist’s dilemmas with heavy melodrama” (W4), it is also possible
that Read is emphasizing, in the character of Louisa, his belief that, as Patrick Carnes puts it, "loose morals cause the collapse of "normal" sexual behavior" (31).

In their self-help book, *The First Step: For People in Relationships with Sex Addicts*, co-writers Mic Hunter and Jem define sexual addiction as

> the thinking and behavior patterns of a person who uses sex to cope with life and to defend against low self-worth and a shameful identity. For the addict, sex is not a fulfilling experience that enhances a primary relationship and life itself, but a compulsive, often highly ritualized activity that ultimately adds to the pain and loneliness the addict is already battling. (1)

According to this definition, Louisa clearly fits the profile of a sexual addict in that she compulsively seeks out sexual partners when she feels "the need," as she describe[s] it to herself" (127). Read's point is that the kind of sexual activity which Louisa's experiments with *The Kama Sutra* involve leads not to the loosening of inhibitions and increased sexual health but to compulsive and self-destructive sexual activity. Most therapists involved in the treatment of sexual addicts argue, as does Patrick Carnes, that "sexual addiction is a misnomer. It is really love addiction – or mixture of both" (13). Carnes goes on to add that "undoubtedly, culture helps define "normal" sexuality" (31) and it is clear that Read is at pains to point out, in the tragedy of Louisa, that while sexual activity as recreation may be increasingly acceptable in secular society it cannot be considered a "normal" or healthy response to physical desire because it leads on to severe personality disorders such as sexual addiction. For Read, sexual restraint is the yardstick of both psychic and spiritual health, as he makes clear in many of his novels.

As Marian E. Crowe has observed, "a turn toward conversion for a Read protagonist invariably includes an abhorrence for sexual excess" (312) and this is nowhere more in evidence that in *The Professor's Daughter*. Lilian's rejection of her extra-marital lover is surely a sign that she has recognized the harm that her infidelity has caused within her family and is on her way, if not toward a full conversion experience, then toward a greater devotion to her role as wife and mother. Henry's restraint when in the grip of an urge to make love to his teenaged daughter is a measure of the man he is to become when, toward the end of the
novel, he reads St. Augustine's spiritual autobiography and begins the personal transformation which is completed in his martyrdom. Although Louisa does not undergo what might be considered a spiritual transformation, the fact that she is able to defer sexual intimacy with Julius Tate until they are sure that they are embarked upon a committed love relationship is a sign that she is at least on the path toward righteousness. Since Julius is half-Mexican, perhaps his Catholic heritage will resurface and lead them both into the Catholic fold, especially since Julius' restraint when Louisa offers herself to him on first acquaintance is a sign that, in Read's book at least, he is a man capable of denying the flesh in the interests of a moral principle.

Interestingly, Patrick Carnes discusses the various constructions and values placed upon sexual restraint in his book, *Contrary to Love*, which addresses the problems of sexual addiction. Carnes points out that the connection between sexual liberality and social disorder is by no means proven. In Sweden, for example, the legalization of pornography is thought to have been “responsible for a decrease in incidence of child molestation, perversions, and other sexual deviations” (30). He also points out that “to some, sex is an index to all that is wrong with a culture” and that “in one sense, the “decline of civilization” theory does help us find the underlying causes of addictive behaviour such as alcoholism and sexual compulsivity (30-1). The stresses of modern life can, according to Carnes, lead certain individuals to use sex as a coping mechanism with which to deal with the increased pressures of “our unsettled times” (30). Carnes goes on to warn, however, that “those who contend that compulsive sexuality signifies cultural decay oversimplify a complex problem” (30). He argues that sexual repression [of which the Catholic Church is frequently accused] and pathological sexual beliefs also play a role in sexual compulsivity and that we need to “acknowledge how culturally fundamental is our fear of ‘uncontrolled’ sex” (32-4). Furthermore, Carne says, “the moralistic church, in its battle to control the lust-driven sinner, shares a common element with the addict: obsession” (89). Commentators who have recognized in Read’s work “that dismal Catholic scenario which insists that God may only be approached by way of man’s complete physical
and emotional degradation" (Flynn 631) would perhaps see in Read’s portrayal of Louisa’s plight an example of a Catholic obsession with sexual degradation. Carne’s words have particular relevance, too, in view of Louisa’s confession to Dr. Fisher that the guilt that her sexual laxity produces in her is what she has to “get over,” rather than the behaviour itself.

Unfortunately, Read does not make clear the connection between Louisa’s half-understood experience of near incest and her consequent sexual addiction. Carne states that one of the “risk factors” which “contributes to an individual’s vulnerability to sex addiction” is “a high probability of having been sexually abused as a child, although the addict may not recognize the abuse or see its connection to current behavior” (6, my emphasis). Louisa does, however, ruefully confirm her psychiatrist’s explanation for her addiction, that her promiscuity is her way of “trying to hurt [her] Dad for preferring [her] mother” (141). While she seems not to remember the event which had precipitated it, her father’s rejection of her (in favour of her mother, as she had seen it) has clearly left a deep psychic scar, and Louisa seems prepared to accept her father’s rejection as the reason for her behaviour without believing in Dr. Fisher’s ability to provide a cure. In fact, Read preempts any possibility that medical science might produce a cure for Louisa by portraying the psychiatrist as a man of “slippery words” ((162) whose attempts to treat Louisa are hampered by his own lust for her, a desire which Louisa believes he resists only because he fears she might “report him, post coitum, instead of doing herself in” (142).

With modern psychiatry out of the running as a possible solution to Louisa’s illness, the focus turns to Julius Tate, the informer-masquerading-as-revolutionary whose “straight, heroic features and strong graceful limbs” (130) quickly catch Louisa’s libidinous eye. Louisa warns Dr. Fisher that in order to spite her father she might “rape one of his own students in [the family] living room” (141), but in the event, she settles for a rather childish and – considering her experience – amateur attempt at seduction. Julius rebuffs her, not unkindly, with the vague explanation that “it just isn’t right like that . . . anyway” (151). At their next meeting, when Louisa alludes to her addiction – “only with me it’s not drugs, is it?” – Julius blushes with
embarrassment and explains that for him “there’s got to be some kind of love” (166). When, as they are about to part, Julius kisses Louisa, she experiences what seems to be one of her “gusts of lust,” but manages to compose herself and leave. Julius seems to represent the antidote to the licentious Ned, who had orchestrated Louisa’s sexual liberation with such dire consequences. Just as Yolande facilitates Bernard’s return to sexual health in Lodge’s *Paradise News*, Julius is instrumental in aiding Louisa’s sexual healing. Bernard is cured by his mentor of his inability to perform sexually, however, while Louisa’s rampant sexuality is curbed under Julius’s wholesome influence.

Louisa’s friendship with Julius deepens into romance as they plot, with the other members of their revolutionary cell, the death of Louisa’s father’s closest friend. Finally, Louisa is herself able to resist the temptations of the flesh when Julius invites her into his bed. She explains her decision to Julius by reminding him of his own statement that sexual relations ought properly to be the sign and consequence of mutual love. She tells him, “you said, you remember, that there’s got to be more, and now I think you’re right: but I want to be certain that there is more . . . much more . . . as much as there can be” (194). In these words, Louisa expresses a new commitment to the idea that sexual intercourse belongs within the bonds of a permanent relationship. Apparently, and rather improbably, all that is needed to cure Louisa of her “nymphomania” is the love of a good man.

In a conversation between Henry and Alan, the revolutionary and priest, Read explores the possible causes of Louisa’s tendency to “pick up men” and to “take them back to her apartment” (138). The priest proffers the opinion that Louisa’s behaviour is evidence of a “social phenomenon” and that its category is political rather than theological. However, he is evasive when Henry asks him whether or not she is “a sinner.” Alan goes on to explain that although Louisa’s behaviour might be construed as evidence of depravity, “depravity doesn’t happen just like that” (139). In the priest’s view, Louisa is “a casualty” of a “rotten society” which only revolution can rid of its decay. However, this debate between a Jesuit who is slowly losing his faith, and the college professor who is growing toward a belief in God and in
the reality of sin, reveals little about Read’s design in portraying Louisa as a sexual addict since it fails to penetrate any deeper into the issues involved than their labels. Both men ignore the role which choice, for example, might have played in Louisa’s fall. The result is that Louisa’s tragedy seems to be offered as an example of social determinism with theological overtones rather than as evidence of a malign force for evil at work in the world, and this conflicts with the basic tenets of Read’s professed Catholicism. The reader is left without a clear idea of what, apart from a return to traditional notions of sexual morality and family life, Read proffers as a solution to what he sees as contemporary societal breakdown. As Melvin Maddocks puts it, Read has not so much shaped a resolution as confessed that he dare not imagine one” (W4). It is as if in his determination to arrive at the forgone conclusion that sexual activity is moral only within the confines of a permanent relationship, Read does not pay close enough attention to the means by which he arrives there. Read’s lack of clarity is reminiscent of Graham Greene’s in the novel, *Brighton Rock*. Having created an individual “worthy of hell” according to Catholic notions of evil, in a subsequent interview Greene absolves his character, Pinkie Brown, because, he says, his behaviour “arose out of the conditions to which he had been born” (Allain 164). While Greene’s inconsistency seems to stem from his discomfort with the absolutes of Catholic dogma, it is Read’s dogmatic certainty which leads to his failing to lay an adequate foundation for the outcome toward which his faith leads his fiction. This failing in the work of an otherwise skilled and accomplished writer is no less a frustration to the reader who shares Read’s ontology than to critics who, like Paul Ableman, dismiss his work as “theology masquerading as fiction” (21).

In Read’s novels, the vice and virtue which contest for the soul of the protagonist are most often sexual sin and its antidote, sexual renunciation, or at least, sexual restraint. Marian E. Crowe has pointed out that “Read’s projects may be interpreted as an attempt to take on the world, the flesh, and the devil – the classic trio of tempters that seek to ensnare humankind in the morality plays – but to show them in contemporary dress “ (310). Undeniably, in Read’s fiction, the sins of the flesh are clearly depicted as the chief ploys of the devil and the “World”
to lure "decent, well-intentioned people" from the path of righteousness clearly mapped out in Church moral law. Indeed, Henry Mascall, the cold and calculating seducer of the troubled wife, Clare, in A Married Man is little more filled out as a character than a figure in a Christian allegory. He is the personification of lust, an allegorical character once found in mediaeval morality plays. However, he is also a clearly recognizable figure from the late twentieth century, and deservedly takes his place among the many villains of realist fiction who have found seduction of other people's wives a great deal of fun.

Despite the frustration expressed above over the fact that Read's fiction is at times held hostage to his theological integrity, I believe it is neither accurate nor fair to write off Read's novels as "theology masquerading as fiction" (Ableman 21). While there are moments in the narrative in which it seems the theologian in Read has wrestled the pen from the hand of Read the novelist (the depiction of Hilary Fletcher's conversion in The Upstart, for example), the didactic intrusions are not sufficiently disruptive to detract from what are interesting tales skillfully told. However, any novelist who adheres to a system of belief which claims to teach definitive truths ought surely to be vigilant lest he or she succumb to the temptation to manipulate plot or characters in order to arrive at foregone moral conclusions. One of Flannery O'Connor's great strengths is that, despite her Christian orthodoxy, her faith informs but never drives her fiction. Where such balance is achieved, the work of novelists of orthodox religious persuasion can be read and appreciated by all alike, and not merely by those who share the writer's religious focus. Read has owned to a desire to be authentic, but he does not make it clear whether he speaks of himself in this context as a Catholic or as a novelist, although the two need not be incompatible. As Philip Flynn has pointed out, what seem like melodrama "might be examples of God's intervening grace to readers who share Read's ontology" (631). However, the success of one's fictional writing ought not to depend on one's reader's belief in one's ideology.

In the two novels explored in this chapter, a clear picture emerges of what for Read are the problems facing women in a predominantly secular society. In the character of Clare
Strickland, in *A Married Man*, Read portrays the dangers of seeking a compromise between secular values and Catholic moral law. Although Clare fondly imagines that she remains a "good Catholic" despite adopting the secular and materialistic values of her friends, when temptation strikes in the demonic figure of Henry Mascall, it becomes clear that the steady erosion of her will to obey the tenets of Church law have left her too spiritually weak to resist. Like that of the three friends, Isabel, Eleanor, and Liz, in Mary Gordon's *Final Payments*, Clare's faith has gradually been reduced to the automatic practice of rites and rituals. Clare's sense of life as a response to the redeeming sacrifice of Christ's incarnation and death has been lost, and there remains no logical reason for Clare to deny her sexual desires. As Clare points out to Father Pearce, "waiting around to die" and denying oneself pleasure because one can "square everyone but God," seem "ridiculous" (248).

In the *Professor's Daughter*, Read reiterates his point that adherence to the principles of moral relativism, which has been, since the early 1970s, "a serious contender for the crown of philosophical orthodoxy in our time" (Harré vii), leads inexorably to familial and social disorder. Read sets out in his fiction to present his reader with an antidote to the malaise within contemporary society which he believes is largely the result of the disappearance of commonly shared and approved notions of morality, but without resort to outdated concepts which are unlikely to find credence among post-conciliar liberal Catholics. In *A Married Man*, for example, Clare is advised by Father Pearce to think of adultery, not as a sin "against chastity, but as one against love" (237). Clearly, Read realizes that while the old-fashioned virtues of chastity and purity have a deflated currency in contemporary society, an appeal to Clare based on her love for her family is more likely to be successful. Similarly, in *The Professor's Daughter*, Read seems to suggest that sexual sin represents an offence against the love invested in the family unit, which is the foundation of society. Moral Relativism, Read suggests, is a short-sighted philosophy which ignores the eternal consequences and significance of human behaviour and allows the individual to indulge in pleasures which, if viewed according to objective moral reasoning, ought rightly to be renounced as undermining
the moral foundations of society. Both the Catholic Clare and the non-Catholic Louisa succumb to sexual sin because they do not appreciate what Read believes is "the close connection between sexual sin and the moral life" (Crowe 323). Read is at pains to point out in his fiction that the secular notion that sexual freedom leads to happiness is a dangerous misapprehension, since "the very strength of this instinct which has preserved our species through so many millennia and inspires in its proper place such happiness and beauty, can if misused and perverted wreak great evil and cause much misery" (246), as it does in the lives of Clare Strickland and Louisa Rutledge.
Chapter V

Anne Redmon

Perhaps because the American Catholic novelist Anne Redmon has lived in England with her British husband, the drama critic Dominic Nightingale, for most of her adult life, scholars and critics have seemed to be at a loss as to whether to place her work within the English or American literary traditions. For example, in Anita Gandolfo's *Testing the Faith: The New Catholic Fiction in America*, which was published in 1992, Redmon's name does not even appear in the index; while Thomas Woodman refers to her fiction frequently in his work, *Faithful Fictions: The Catholic Novel in British Literature* (1991). It may be that because Redmon's novels are usually set in the British Isles and are most often concerned with the lives of English characters, Woodman claims her for the British tradition, while Gandolfo considers her work to be that of an adopted Englishwoman, particularly as Redmon's move to England predates the beginning of her literary career. Redmon, however, considers herself to be "almost completely American." In an interview with Catherine Rainwater and William Scheick she claims rather testily -- English fiction "bores me into a kind of coma" ("Interview" 335) -- that she writes "in an English idiom because [she is] surrounded by the sounds." Redmon also claims that her "characters are English only superficially" (340), and this is largely true; cultural concerns are almost completely absent from her work after *Emily Stone*. Later in the same article, Redmon again asserts her claim to write with a "sensibility that is American" in that she has "preserved [her] native openness," her "use of strong emotion and [her] rather baroque use of language [which] stems almost wholly from an American tradition" (341). She has "always been aware," she says, "of a Southern Gothic background" (331).

Redmon's focus on the inner lives and consciousness of her characters, and her carefully wrought and often ambiguous style, is reminiscent of another exiled American novelist, Henry James, who also chose to make his home in England. Yet Redmon's style is distinctly her own and not overtly derivative. In fact, in his review of Redmon's first novel, *Emily Stone*, John Spurling remarks upon the rarity of a first novel which has such a "strong
and original flavour that one begins to look for comparisons only after finishing it" (341). On first acquaintance, Redmon's works do seem to be, as Rainwater and Scheick point out, "solidly English in their "matter"" (340), but Redmon's awareness of her American literary heritage, particularly of the work of Henry James, Flannery O'Connor, and William Faulkner -- despite his "many faults" -- is clearly evident in the first three of her novels which are the focus of this chapter. In her second novel, *Music and Silence*, for example, the troubled inner monologues of Redmon's central character, Beatrice Pazzi, are reminiscent of the tortured consciousness of several of James' heroines, while the evil figure of Ilse Alba in the same novel reminds the reader of Flannery O'Connor's grotesque fictional characters. Catherine Rainwater has suggested, too, that the Bible salesman in O'Connor's "Good Country People" may "perhaps figure in the creation of Redmon's Arthur Marsdan," the religious maniac in *Music and Silence* (DLBY 321). A central source of the richness of Redmon's fiction lies, however, in her use of a wide variety of literary genres and periods that reach far beyond what she herself characterizes as her American inheritance. Redmon draws upon the Bible (from the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden, for example) and from the classics (from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in the structure of *Music and Silence*) in constructing novels which are both complex and profound in their vision.

After Piers Paul Read's clear and straightforward storytelling, the almost Jamesian ambiguity of Anne Redmon's narrative style and the complex structure of her novels present something of a shock. However, Redmon's often enigmatic style is perfectly suited to the preoccupations of her characters as they attempt to "make their lives conform to patterns" and "either discover or fail to discover the power of free will to extricate themselves from the destruction and loneliness which result from unquestioned acceptance of patterns established in the past" (DLBY 320). Redmon herself has observed that "it is very important to [her] to have a precise structure for her novels because of the very emotional nature of [her] writing" ("Interview" 328). Read's style, which is almost journalistic at times, accords well with the focus of his fiction. His interest lies chiefly in locating the causes of human unhappiness in
the moral relativism espoused by modern secular society, and this focus necessarily involves an emphasis on the role of cultural and social conditioning. Redmon, in contrast, focuses largely upon the tension between fate and free will in the lives of her characters, following with minute attention their shifting perceptions and agonized self-questioning. Such an approach requires firm anchorage and solid structure if the reader is to follow Redmon's "elegant psychological puzzle[s] in which a mere "change of mood or a minute shift in the balance of power during a conversation can be enough to change forever the course of a character's life" (Garis 41-2).

Redmon has commented on the fact that she "has always been extremely concerned with the question of free will and destiny," adding, "I have become increasingly absorbed with the tension implicit in these two apparent opposites – partly because I'm inclined to wonder what makes people tick and also because I've observed that a person's attitude towards the amount of control he or she might have over destiny seems to determine his or her character and moral direction" ("Interview" 323). She links this apparent connection between the exercise of free will and the moral life to her Catholic faith when she remarks that "Catholic theology lays heavy emphasis on free-will" (323). Later in the same interview, Redmon adds the proviso that "Roman Catholic thinking can go overboard on will," and in doing so, sometimes overlooks the fact that understanding and memory, as well as free will, "define the soul" (324).

Redmon's Catholicism clearly informs her fiction, and under its influence one might reasonably expect her to conceive her characters according to traditional notions of role and gender. However, Redmon is concerned with the struggle of her female characters to break out of an isolation which is frequently a consequence of their submission to roles imposed upon them by others, and because of this focus, she is less interested in prescribed social roles than in individual realities. In Second Sight, for example, Irene Ward struggles to throw off, first, the role tailored for her in childhood by her brother Durrand and, later, the role of caretaker in which her sister's madness traps her. Elizabeth Ammons has shown in her
article, "Infanticide and Other Ways of Mothering in Anne Redmon's Music and Silence," that Redmon has explored extensively the many modes of mothering. However, Redmon's treatment of this subject goes far beyond the traditional expectations of motherhood. In fact, although Redmon is wary of the term "feminist," as Catherine Rainwater notes, "her works are of much interest to scholars of women's studies, for they represent experience from a variety of traditionally and nontraditionally female points of view" (DLBY 322).

Redmon has little time for feminist or psychosocial notions of women's liberation. She espouses, instead, a transcendent notion of liberation in making "a distinction between archetypal aspects of women and women who have the power to become the daughters of God" ("Interview" 337). For Redmon, a daughter of God is a woman who, like Beatrice, in Music and Silence, is willing to "be eaten alive with love" for others, whereas, before her transformation, she had merely "eaten love herself [in the Eucharist] with reverent froideur" (232). As much as Redmon rejects the kind of extreme feminism which requires her to "reject God, [her] husband, and [her] sons" ("Interview" 336), she is equally resistant to "the plaster saint brigade of Catholics" for whom extreme feminism has provided "a very useful warning" (336). Such Catholics, Redmon argues, "seem to ask women to become objects, and the devotion they pay is not real love but a way of containing a threatening force." Redmon concludes that

it is blasphemous to regard a human being of either sex as a thing or a tool. There is a strand in Catholic mentality which warps the meaning of sacrifice, which can only be the free gift of self. Smashing the female personality into a Procrustean bed of historical expectations can hardly be the will of one who freely gave His life on the cross. ("Interview" 336)

These two strong aversions, one for extreme forms of feminism and the other for the "right-wing members of [her] church who appall [her] equally with their rigid, male, and really very nasty attitude towards women" ("Interview" 336), have led Redmon to follow, not so much a middle road, but a path that transcends traditional notions of gender. In her fiction, Redmon explores the struggles of characters, predominantly women, to overcome both restrictive
externally prescribed and self-imposed imposed patterns of destiny and to exercise their God-
given free will.

Such a path has led Redmon to a focus upon spiritual rather than physical love because, as Redmon sees it, spiritual love "transcends sexuality and gender" ("Interview" 335). She adds that she eschews the use of masculine pronouns in reference to God because "to call God "HIM," . . . isn't really satisfactory to [her] – not because of feminism, but because the contact is something I sense to be more profound than sexuality." For Redmon, "getting rid of images by reifying them is more important than making them" (Interview" 338). She qualifies these statements by adding that "gender is an important consideration "since we [unlike the angels] completely inhabit our bodies" ("Interview" 335). However, she believes that "a false dichotomy has been set up between the spirit and the senses" ("Interview" 334). It is this "false dichotomy" which Redmon is at pains to expose in her fiction because it has led to the equation of sexlessness with chastity. In fact, as Thomas Woodman has argued, "Redmon's whole approach depends upon the firm differentiation of chastity from sexlessness" (154) because the distinction allows for a redefinition of traditional stereotypes. Redmon is always less concerned with sexual sin than with the role which sexuality plays in the development of "genuine love" which for Redmon is "always spiritual."

Although Redmon has more recently written a trilogy which chronicles the fortunes of two families who "have been closely connected for decades through friendship and ties of blood" (The Judgement of Solomon, back cover), I have chosen to explore Redmon's first three novels, Emily Stone (1974), Music and Silence (1997), and Second Sight (1987), because they seem to me to comprise a trilogy of another kind, one in which Redmon works progressively toward a full realization in fiction of her vision of liberation from the destructive patterns of the past though spiritual love. This love is aptly defined by Catherine Rainwater as a "profound communion with an Other, the beloved self of another person" ("Some Godlike Grammar" 182). Irene, the heroine of Redmon's Second Sight, is an epileptic whose life has been limited by her acceptance of her cruel brother's interpretation of the meaning of her
illness and his dismissive prognostications for her future. For each of the heroines of these three novels, her liberation from the past and into love involves a recognition of the sexual aspects of love, even of maternal or platonic love for a woman. Often, in Redmon's fiction, love for a woman, including sexual desire, is a precursor of love for a male partner.

While each of the main characters of Redmon's first three novels is touched in some way by the power of spiritual love, only Maud, in *Music and Silence*, and Irene, in *Second Sight* seem able to combine spiritual love with sexual consummation. In *Emily Stone*, Emily is unable to envision the sexual act as the gift of her "self" to another. For her, sex is merely "functional." It is "an enjoyable by-blow" of a relationship which "relieve[s] physical tension and loneliness rather in the way that eating relieves hunger and irritability" (119). In Redmon's second novel, Beatrice appears to be on the brink of casting off the virginal habit of a lifetime by giving herself in marriage to her colleague, Benjamin Rose. However, death in the form of martyrdom intervenes while she and Ben are still unsure whether their love will lead on to permanent commitment in marriage. Days before her death, Beatrice decides, enigmatically, that she

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Would and could and wanted} \\
\text{When he could and would want} \\
\text{Her.} \\
\text{They would have to see.} \quad (229)
\end{align*}
\]

Maud, however, is sufficiently healed by her encounter with the saintly Beatrice to enter into a married relationship and to bear and nurture children. Similarly, Irene Ward, in Redmon's third novel, *Second Sight*, is clearly headed toward an acceptance of love, both spiritual and physical as, at the end of the novel, she goes out to meet the man who has crossed the ocean to come to her in love.

Curiously, the Secker and Warburg English editions of Redmon's first two novels, and the America edition of her third novel, published by E.P. Dutton, have on their dust jackets images which evoke the ossified patterns of understanding and behaviour which have prevented Redmon's characters from the liberating exercise of their free-will. The dust jacket
for *Emily Stone* depicts a grave ornament, a stone angel which at once reflects the saintliness of Emily's childhood friend, Sasha, whose willingness to involve herself in the lives of others so perplexes Emily in her stony repugnance for human contact, and the willed coldness of Emily herself. On the dust jacket for *Music and Silence*, the detail after William Blake's painting entitled "Elohim Creating Adam" again reflects Redmon's concern in the novel with patterns of response to the world which are forever fixed, as if on canvas, yet perhaps less rigidly than is implied by the carved statue which illustrates the cover of *Emily Stone*. The dust jacket for *Second Sight*, however, seems optimistically to herald a resolution to the problem created by the tension between fate and free will. It shows the relaxed and flexible figure of a woman reclining upon the rigid forearm of a huge submerged stone statue. Such a juxtaposition of the rigid and the flexible represents a visual corollary of Redmon's vision in fiction. In this third novel, Redmon's heroine, Irene, learns to distinguish between the steely template of limited possibility which her brother had imposed upon her in his systematic conditioning of her during their childhood and her more pliant self which emerges to embrace first her tormented sister and, later, the man with whom she falls in love.

In *Emily Stone* the central character that gives her name to the novel is ultimately unable to emerge from her isolation and the rigid self-sufficiency that keeps others at bay. In *Music and Silence*, a solution to the problem is worked out in the character of Beatrice who, after a great deal of agonized soul searching, is able to go beyond the sterile and isolating mode of piety which her austere form of the Catholic faith seems to encourage in her, to become involved in the troubled life of a young musician, Maud, who lives in the flat below hers. Maud, for whom Beatrice eventually sacrifices her life, is able, as a result of Beatrice's supreme act of giving, to show compassion for Ilse Alba, the woman who attempts to destroy her. In an epiphanic moment in which she recognizes and understands that she and Ilse are irrevocably linked in suffering by the misfortune that has overtaken them both, Maud reaches out her hand toward Ilse. Ilse, however, is unable or unwilling to accept Maud's gesture, and remains isolated within her own unhappiness. The novel ends with a sense that, although
Beatrice achieves transcendence of self, her triumph is partial at best. Although Maud is able to overcome the tragic circumstances which her obsession with the 'cellist, Thomas Alba, have generated, she is unable to reach the unhappy woman who has been the chief instigator of her unhappiness. In *Second Sight*, however, the triumph of community over isolation and the victory of free-will over fate seems complete as Redmon’s heroine, Irene, is able to break through the wall of loneliness and fear which she had allowed her malign brother to construct around her. Her self-liberation is complete in that she is able to recognize that the call to community requires more than a willingness to enter into a spiritual communion with another. It behooves her to own up to her reluctance for physical contact, the blame for which she has habitually and untruthfully directed toward the demands of her religion and her medical condition. As the novel ends, and Irene decides to run out to meet the man who has loved her throughout her ordeal, Redmon implies that Irene will be able to give herself, both body and spirit, whereas before her awakening, she had lain, as if fallen into a “cave” deep within herself, “panicked and reclusive” (96), until her admirer of the moment lost interest in wooing her.

Redmon’s primary focus upon friendship, in her first two novels, and upon the relationship between three siblings in her third, might lead one to presuppose that matters of sexuality are of little importance in her fiction. However, despite the absence of overt sexuality in her novels, Redmon infuses her narratives with a strong sense of passion and sensuality by her skillful use of a baroque style and a gift for apt metaphor. Furthermore, Redmon is as able in portraying the absence of passion as she is in depicting the sexual yearnings of her characters. By focusing upon friendship and sibling relationships, furthermore, Redmon is able to address the sexual from a perspective that bypasses the traditional notions of sexual orientation and to reach what she believes to be a more fundamental notion of love. For Redmon, the sexual urge is merely one of a cluster of impulses that make up the profound spirit-based impulse to reach out from the self to embrace the other. In loving others, Redmon suggests in her fiction, whether of the same or of the opposite sex, one ought not be
surprised or dismayed to find sexual feeling asserting itself whenever one loves with the kind of “spiritual love” which Redmon believes to be the highest form of love available to humanity. The kind of transcendent “spiritual love” which Redmon has in mind mirrors Christ’s “wounded, personal, passionate love” for the individual (Music and Silence 233). Moreover, the spiritual love between human beings ought to reflect the “contact” between God and the individual, a connection which Redmon believes is “more profound than mere sexuality” (“Interview” 338).

Transcendent spiritual love requires, however, a willingness to be vulnerable to the beloved and an understanding that growth in love requires one to break through the “web” of past hurts and to alter one’s destiny through the exercise of a God-given free will. Spiritual love is not always comfortable, however, and Redmon has a strong Catholic respect for the value of suffering. As Elizabeth Ammons points out, Redmon’s heroine in Music and Silence suffers greatly from the almost maternal love she feels for Maud. It is “complex and sexual, and frightening” (354). Yet, as Ammons argues, in the suffering which such love engenders may lie deliverance from the “hell” of loneliness and isolation which both women endure with only a ceiling between them. Perhaps here lies the answer to the question posed by the religious maniac, Arthur Marsdan, in Music and Silence: “Where is the foot of the cross?” For Redmon, the foot of the cross, the supreme symbol of both suffering and new life, perhaps lies at the point of contact between the lover and the beloved, which is also, perhaps, the point where “God and the soul touch” (“Interview” 326).

From another perspective, Redmon’s first three novels can be viewed as studies in obsession. Emily narrates her own story in Emily Stone as she sifts through her memories of the past in an attempt to understand both her obsession with her long-dead friend, Sasha Courtney, and the failure of her marriage. Emily correctly suspects that the two are linked. Emily’s narrative is “chronologically fragmented” in that her musings about the past are intersected by accounts of the present in which she tries desperately to recreate the sealed and symbiotic relationship she had enjoyed with her husband before Sasha had reentered their lives. She attempts to reconstruct the past in order to discover the point at which her
bleak and self-sufficient philosophy had failed her. As she places the pieces of the puzzle which is her life, Emily unwittingly reveals to the reader in the process "insights which ultimately elude Emily herself" (DLBY 321). Emily Stone has taken as her life principle the notion that solitariness offers the best protection from the pain which emotional involvement in the lives of others inevitably brings. In comparing herself with the husband she despises for his propensity to be "crushed by love," Emily prides herself on the self-sufficiency that protects her from such weakness. "I am free," she says, "to walk in the void, but solitary, solitary, solitary, I have no human race to run" (242).

Emily's reluctance to enter into relationship with others is a result both of her upbringing and of a willed coldness that is evident in her fastidious avoidance of both physical and emotional contact. She has been raised in a household in which it is assumed that human unhappiness can be cured by the flick of a duster and by a few well-organized charity committees. Daily life had been conducted as if the occupants were a group of strangers sharing accommodation rather than as a loving family unit. Emily reflects that "efficiency and hard work" had been the yardstick of virtue in their home and although her physical needs had been efficiently taken care of, she had clearly been starved of parental -- particularly maternal -- love. Sasha's home life, in contrast, had been chaotic, rather exotic, and full of love.

Although her baptismal name is Alexandra, Sasha had chosen the Russian familiar form of the name for herself that accorded with her sense of herself as the heroine of a romantic Russian novel. Sasha had been encouraged in her flamboyance and gregariousness by her adoring mother and devoted nanny. She had been as cherished by her family as Emily was ignored by hers. Emily's introduction to Sasha's family life -- she had all but moved in with Sasha and her mother -- provided her with the means to view her own family with a degree of objectivity. As her friendship with Sasha had developed, however, Emily did not acquire the generosity of spirit that characterized her friend. Rather, she had fed off Sasha's kindness while retreating further and further into the role she had constructed for herself which defined her as Sasha's opposite. She had been both attracted and repelled
by Sasha’s exuberance, just as, as a young woman, she would be both attracted and repelled by the blatant sensuality that Sasha’s lover had exuded. The warmth and attention which Sasha and her mother lavished upon Emily made up, to some degree, for her emotionally barren home life, yet, while she had allowed herself to be nourished and sustained by their loving kindness, she had felt at the same time a contempt for Sasha’s poor taste and lack of emotional restraint. While she had been unable to resist the warmth and affection which spilled over onto her from the best friend whose enthusiasm for life she could not match, Emily had chosen, resentfully, to see herself as having been taken up by Sasha as her “new prize,” an object whose purpose was to illuminate, by contrast, the sheer brilliance of Sasha’s personality. Emily is by nature fastidious and controlled, whereas Sasha’s enthusiasm for life had spilt out in a reckless disregard for the vulnerability which is its inevitable corollary. Life with Sasha had seemed, under the influence of her ebullience, “voluptuous with possibilities” (42).

Despite the profound difference in their characters, however, Emily and Sasha had had in common from the start a strong belief in fate that would, as their lives unfolded, hobble the attempts of both to make full use of their free will. As Redmon has pointed out,

Sasha’s life is substantially ruined by her childlike belief in fate. It cripples her will – her acting career is mangled by her naïve belief that outside forces, having predetermined a happy outcome to her life, relieve her of the burden of working. . . . Emily’s Freudian, deterministic background makes her subject to the worst sort of fatalism. Sasha at least has access to something outside herself in her mother’s love and in a sense that there is a super-natural dimension in life to which she finally responds by choosing to become a Catholic. (323)

Given the bleak circumstances of her home life and her mother’s emotional neglect of her, the cards are clearly stacked against Emily’s successful assimilation into the sphere of human relationships. Yet, as Leslie Garis remarks, Emily’s coldness is not just an inability to feel but a determination not to be drawn into emotional contact with others. “[She] is cold, not simply because her mother was cold; there is an element of her own will in the equation that defies simplification” (43). Even her mother, cold as she is, had found Emily perplexingly remote as a child. “Of all my children,” she tells Emily, “I have worried about you the least. You never
seemed to have need of me or anybody else. You were always a very private child" (248). As desperately as Emily tries to retain the isolation that is essential to her safety, she seeks to know with equal desperation the source of Sasha's happiness, which for her is so elusive. The novel is punctuated throughout with Emily's anguished and obsessive questioning: “I have never wished to be intimate with anyone else but Sasha. But why Sasha? Why Sasha of all people, for whom I think I felt a little contempt?” (188).

Emily’s and Sasha’s friendship had begun as a result of a telling episode that in many ways defines the character of each girl. Sasha had come to Emily’s rescue when Emily became the focus of her classmates’ amused derision. In her strong desire to “fit in” at school, or perhaps to demonstrate her superiority over her peers, Emily had interrupted a “lusty” teenage discussion on the “habits of boys in the back row of the cinema” (7) with a piece of clinical information which had no doubt originated in one of her mother’s lectures on the subject. In her lectures for young people, which Peter observes constitute a kind of "absurd catechism," Emily’s mother reduces human sexuality to a simple matter of “a little biology,” with some sociological implications having to do with responsibility. Completely ignorant of the spiritual and emotional aspects of sexuality, and insensitive to the atmosphere of deliciously suppressed excitement among the girls, Emily had coolly told the group of girls that “men approach a sexual peak at the age of nineteen, whereas with women it comes much later” (7), and had been astonished and hurt when they had laughed at her. Sasha, who had also been a misfit in her adolescent world, but who had accepted and even enjoyed her role as “school eccentric,” had come to Emily’s defence and adopted her as her best friend.

Thus, it is clear from the start that Emily’s remoteness is to a great degree a function of her fear of the rejection of others, and that Sasha’s outgoing nature had owed a great deal to her strength of character—particularly her ability to withstand the disdain or disapproval of

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1 Each of Redmon’s novels discussed in this chapter comprises both the reminiscences of a main character and events that take place in the ‘present’ of the narratives. In the interests of clarity, therefore, I have discussed the recollections of these characters
others. Starved of attention in her own home, Emily had been unable to resist Sasha’s affirmation of her when she told Emily that she was “the only one [in the school] worth talking to,” and that she admired Emily for her courage in being herself (8). From this moment, Sasha had begun to recreate Emily according to her own romantic notions of Emily’s character. Sadly, however, under cover of this invented self, the mixture of envy, bitterness, and scorn that she had increasing felt toward Sasha had slowly infected Emily’s character. By the end of their shared childhood, Sasha had perfected her ability to avoid reality by romanticizing herself and Emily beyond recognition, and Emily, an “emotional Puritan,” had been carried along quietly in her wake. In Sasha’s romantic parlance, they had been, during their girlhood, “solid sisters against a hostile world” (24).

A trip to Italy, which Emily had made with Sasha and her family, provides more evidence of the great difference between the two friends and illustrates further Emily’s severely limited understanding of human relationships. Affected by the heat of the Italian summer, each of the girls had responded physically and emotionally in quite different ways. Emily reflects that “the heat may have melted Sasha’s English resistance to God and minted on her an image which she never lost” (49). In the Italian churches Sasha had been awed by the great faith which had led to their creation and had been imbued with a sense of the numinous which culminated, near the end of her life, in her conversion to Catholicism. Even as an adolescent, she had been capable of a profound spiritual insight that would elude Emily throughout her life. When, with the bottled foetus her mother kept for her “hygiene” classes in mind, Emily had criticized Sasha for kneeling before the embalmed body of St. Clare, Sasha had quietly told her that she had thought she was “kneeling in the presence of love . . . which overcomes death” (48). Emily reflects that Sasha’s “hunger” after the spiritual had been a topic that they avoided talking about, and which both recognized as marking an essential difference between them. Rather than causing in her a spiritual awakening, “the heat planted using the past and past perfect tenses while reserving the present tense only for discussion of the narrative present.
quite a different seal on [Emily]; it made [her] body slouch with languour and sexual desire” (49). She had responded to this sexual awakening in her typically cold and unemotional way. She has always found “the subject of sex distasteful” and the thought of “defiling” herself so abhorrent that, rather than give in to the temptation to masturbate, she had bitten “[her] hands in bed at night so cruelly that [she] occasionally drew blood” (49). Smitten in Italy with the heat of sexual desire, Emily had looked around dispassionately for someone who could still the purely physical itch which the sexual urge represents in the paltry lexicon of her emotions.

Although she had been mildly attracted to Sasha’s brother, whose emerging adolescent sexuality is skillfully suggested by Redmon in a description of his eating habits – he sucked, and shoved spaghetti into his mouth” and “pushed peaches into his mouth with casual greed” – Emily had not returned the obvious sexual invitation of her friend’s brother because what she had hoped for was an impersonal encounter in which her sexual needs could be met without risk to her self-containment. She had found what she was looking for in the gardener at the house in which they were staying. Knowing Luigi to be unhappy with his wife, she had lured the Italian to her bedroom and, relishing the power that seduction provides, had undergone a “disappointing” first sexual experience in which “[her] curiosity was, at any rate, satisfied if nothing else” (51). In order to render the union as impersonal as possible, Emily had thrown the gardener ten pounds as payment for having deflowered her. Insulted, Luigi had called Emily a “whore,” but in paying him, Emily had successfully reduced an act of sexual union to an exchange of goods and services. This first sexual encounter illustrates very clearly the deep split in Emily’s personality which she herself observes “in a clinical sort of way” (49).

Emily knows herself to possess the kind of urgent sex drive which “men are supposed to have,” and is stimulated by the mere sight of the sweating, muscular bodies of workmen in the street. She even hints at having what might be construed as aberrant sexual tastes when she says that during her Italian holiday, her “desire in her dreams was not ordinary” (49, my emphasis) and that even though her husband does not know how to satisfy her, she
"disdain[s] to tell him" (49). When, later, she talks of having watched Peter's "perfect mouth" as he lay in his hospital bed after his suicide attempt, she fondly remembers how much she had "liked to bruise his lower lip with her teeth" (75), and in these words, the suggestion is raised that for Emily, sexual satisfaction may well involve the infliction of pain. Despite her lust for navvies, however, she is primly fastidious about her body, shrinking from even the most casual touch (49). Thus, Emily had early in her life established a pattern of behaviour vis à vis sexual activity. Her response to sexual desire would be to satisfy it without giving of herself in reciprocal affection, and to create as much emotional distance as possible between herself and the male object of her lust.

Several years later, when Emily had been studying at university and Sasha had been attending drama school, Sasha had introduced Emily to her lover, Boris, and to Boris's friend, Peter. Again, Emily had been physically attracted to the animal sexuality that Boris exudes. She noticed "his virile smile and virile shoulders, and . . . his virile thighs straining at his trousers (60). His friend Peter, however, had seemed to share her distaste for Sasha's and Boris's unrestrained enjoyment of the sensual delights of the evening, and she had begun a relationship with this man who was, seemingly, as coldly self-contained as she. Even his occupation -- he is an archeologist -- had seemed to promise an interest in "things" ossified and hardened and therefore rendered harmless by time, rather than the volatile emotion with which Boris and Sasha had been so vividly alive and that, subsequently, Emily had found so threatening. Her choice of Peter had been intended by Emily, like her deliberate choice of her own coldness of character, to underscore her rejection of Sasha and Boris. As she tries to make sense of her life, she reflects that she had been "obsessed with their behaviour in that restaurant" and that "Peter ran counterpoint to [her] obsession with Boris and Sasha" (83).

At the restaurant, Peter and Emily had watched as Sasha lost herself in the mesmerizing beat of gypsy music, encouraged by Boris who "snapped his strong fingers to her strong stressed moments. [Sasha's] body had become a round submissive thing, a cushion to the rhythm, which erupted from her as if it were her own" (66). That Sasha could
allow herself to be invaded, as it were, by a source of feeling which originated outside herself is a concept which had filled Emily with a fear that forced her further into herself. "[Sasha's] rapture frightened me," she remembers, "and yet I could have stopped her with a word. She held me fascinated, my breath taken away at her ability to be transported" (66). It is as if the sight of Sasha's ecstasy had evoked in Emily an almost sexual response. Later, while Sasha had vomited as the result of over-indulgence in the wine they had drunk at the meal, Emily had faced herself in a mirror and had been momentarily repulsed the "remoteness of [her] expression" (67) which spoke of the poverty of her own emotional life. The moment had passed, however, and Emily had been left again with the vague sense that, despite her poor taste, Sasha had grasped something about the meaning of existence that would forever elude Emily herself.

In this vivid scene, as she does throughout her fiction, Redmon allows her characters' attitudes to food and eating to reveal a great deal about their sexuality. By this means, not only does the reader gain useful insight into the innermost feelings of Redmon's characters, but the narrative is imbued with an eroticism for which a writer of less subtlety might have resorted to explicit sexual description to produce. In allowing the eating habits of her characters to reveal their attitudes to sexuality, Redmon leaves Emily free to narrate her story in a manner completely in keeping with her fastidious and secret nature. In recalling Sasha's obvious enjoyment of the meal they had shared with Boris and Peter, Emily somehow reveals her distaste for physical pleasure quite unconsciously. She remembers that

Sasha stabbed at her chicken leg; instead of a bone, the thing contained hot butter which gushed onto her plate. She gave a Christmas parcel cry. "Oh look! What a delicious surprise!" Her face flushed; her eyes sparkled; she ate a mouthful, inhaling through nostrils with sensuous delight and a bit of food escaped from the corner of her mouth. (64)

Clearly, Sasha had been able to give herself to life with all of her senses, physical and spiritual, while Emily could only watch fearfully from the sidelines, eating "primly [and] feeling that without effort, [her] muscles might weaken and behave as wantonly as [Sasha's]" (65). Tellingly, Emily admits: "the bodily function which I loathe most is the process of eating" (65).
Peter seems to share her repugnance since Emily remembers that he had "sawed irritably at his food" while Sasha and Boris had fed each other bit of chicken and enjoyed the feast (65).

Emily had entered into a relationship with Peter because his view of the world had seemed as coldly superior as her own. His "cool, controlled voice" and "air of poised detachment" had allowed him to penetrate the wall of her defence against human relationships and had lulled her fear with a false sense of security. Even his scholarship in archeology had seemed to suggest to her that he preferred to deal with life in a few solid, well-defined, and long-dead objects that can be poked and prodded dispassionately without fear of their responding. Peter lives in a flat at the top of a house occupied by slum tenants which he had made, long before meeting Emily, into a temple to his own ascetic taste. High above the world which both despised, Emily and Peter had lived a cloistered existence in which no outsider was allowed to intrude upon their conjoint contentment. As she pours over the pieces of their now shattered relationship, Emily recalls the "wonderful simplicity" of their lives together, by which she means the perfect reflection of the other each had provided:

I sat poised, in Peter's flat, over my books; he over his. We worked together, interrupted only now and then by the noise of some disaster in the family below us. Every now and then, we would come to the surface and talk, eat, or make love. We cooked chops and frozen peas over his gas ring; neither of us knew how to cook anything else. Peter, who had no notions about religion in those days, still had a horror of gluttony. He sneered extremely at artistic cooks and gimmicky restaurants. He was repelled by the thought of what food turned into after it was digested or what it would become if left to spoil on the table. . . .

So, we satisfied our physical needs, our need for each other's company on the surface of our lives; then, we plunged back into the contemplative peace of underlining phrases from books with light pencil, rooting through references and jotting down notes.

We made no demands on each other whatsoever. (121-2)

Emily remembers that they had "had an exemplary freedom with each other's bodies," and that, "if there was something a little automatic in [her] responses to him, at least the response was pleasant rather than otherwise" (119). At another point in her musing, Emily remembers her relationship with Peter as a mutual appreciation of similar individuals. Its success had depended on each mirroring the other without encroaching upon the self of the
other. She had been Narcissus staring into the pool, and Peter, her reflection, had stared adoringly back. They had been “cool as geometry.” Emily recalls:

We were equidistant, and we tacitly agreed to savour the harmony of this circle. I asked no questions about him; he asked none about me. We did not do the usual prodding with hooks, experimenting with each other’s temperaments. We did not thrash around in cinemas or cars or in his flat – that appears to be the way people mate.

We based our friendship, rather, upon a sensibility we had in common. We walked through the wintry city, our arms, not linked, tangential. (84).

Emily and Peter had created for themselves a world apart in which, almost “ethereal,” they had “walked in perfect unison, almost glided, like ghosts, observing life while unobserved by any living thing” (123), and quite untouched by life itself. Life, as an “ordeal by others,” is something that Emily is determined to avoid.

The combination of emotional restraint and self-containment which attracts Emily to Peter is, in reality, a fragile defence against the return of the nervous illness from which he had only just recovered on meeting Emily. Once he had revealed the fact of his breakdown to Emily, he allowed himself further “luxuries” of emotional indulgence. Very soon he had been using Emily as a weapon with which to beat his parents, whom he believes are responsible for his mental problems. It rapidly becomes clear that Peter’s reticence has been largely the result of an almost complete self-absorption. It very nearly matches Emily’s own. Looking back on the years of their marriage, Emily understands that her feelings for Peter had been based upon the perfection of his features and the orderliness of his life. In him, she says, she “felt a sweet relief. She had “hoarded Peter” (119) as if he, or his love, were a commodity, or a currency she could use to buy the approval of the world. For Emily, “to be lovable, to have it known that you are lovable, is to give the world a sign that you are running for the best” (91).

Peter was [her] cache of peace” (119) in a world in which human emotion seems to threaten on all sides and beg from her a response she cannot give. However, Emily’s need for Peter requires, according to Emily’s value system, a reciprocal gratitude which neither Peter, nor Sasha, had been aware was owed. Neither had realized that Emily resented the love she reluctantly bore them because it gave them power over her. As she often does, Emily speaks
of her love in terms of disease when she says of Peter that, "he is as necessary to me as insulin to a diabetic" (119). For Emily, love, or a need of it, is as inconvenient and debilitating as a chronic illness and, worse, it reflects a weakness or almost a genetic flaw in the sufferer. In a fury of resentment she complains that, “all along, from our earliest days...he has had my need and he counts it as nothing” (120).

Like Peter, Sasha had also been unaware that Emily’s need for her friendship had caused a festering resentment to grow within Emily. Her reluctant investment of love represents, for Emily, a kind of theft on the part of the beloved. In her musings, she wonders why she had felt the need to communicate with Sasha when she has “no real ability to communicate with other people” and she “know[s] this and accepts it as something of a blessing” (188). Rather than accept the challenge that choosing to change would mean, Emily falls back upon the relative safety of fate, the fate that had decreed that she would have no natural ability to communicate. Having accepted what she sees as her innate propensity to shun the friendship of others, Emily had viewed Sasha’s friendship as a threat to her concept of herself as a loner. Rather than face the fact that her isolation is evidence of her cowardice, she projects her fault upon Sasha, whom she says “hadn’t the guts to be alone, to think alone” (189). For all her meandering through the past, true self-knowledge eludes Emily. She is unable to – or determined not to -- understand that she had been drawn to Sasha for all that she had been that Emily had not.

Emily's love for Peter is based upon his reflecting back to her the qualities she herself possesses, whereas Sasha had embodied all that Emily not only despises but all that she fears, particularly the compassion that had led Sasha to reach out and take on Emily, the school outcast, in the first place. In her determination to discover the cause of her mystifying and unwilling love for Sasha anywhere but in the paucity of her own emotional and spiritual life, Emily recalls:

A few years ago, I hit upon the comforting notion that I might be a Lesbian. The idea was so neat – it so elegantly explained my need for her, my wrath at Peter – that it brought me, for a time, considerable relief. The advantages of the theory were
altogether too numerous. I could mourn Sasha frankly as a lost lover; desert Peter and [my son] David as bad mistakes; define myself according to the strangeness of my predilections; regard myself as part of a persecuted minority; find a kind of warmth with another woman; and receive complete absolution from myself on the grounds of my unhappy childhood. (188)

Emily had recognized, however, that she had not felt sexual desire for Sasha, and in rejecting her theory, temptingly tidy though it is, she had rejected, too, the notion that she had ever loved Sasha in any way whatsoever. However, this leaves her with no explanation for the pain she had felt and continues to feel at having betrayed her friend in a calculated attempt to destroy Sasha’s faith in the essential goodness of life and to ruin the happiness that Sasha had believed to be her destiny.

However, it had been less Sasha’s love for her that Emily had resented than her own hunger for that love. She had been equally determined to make Sasha pay for the insult to her refined sensibility that Sasha’s and Boris’s “easy lewdness” had constituted, and from which, despite her repulsion, she had been unable to turn away. When they had both been children together, Sasha had announced dramatically that they would suffer together and, despite Emily’s efforts to render herself immune to the pain that is the downside of human community, Sasha had been proved right. In her emotional detachment Emily is similar to the young thug, Pinkie Brown in Graham Greene’s Brighton Rock who plans the death of his young wife in order to retreat into “hygienic” isolation in which there will be “no more human contacts, other people’s emotions washing at the brain” so that “he would be free again: nothing to think about but himself” (231). Like Emily, he vents his rage not on himself but on the object of his love for having ensnared him. While Emily had not plotted to kill her friend, as Pinkie does his young wife, she had expressed the wish for Sasha to die in order to be rid of the claims of friendship which she feared but could not resist, and to break the emotional tie which had sprung up between her husband and her old friend. Yet, years after Sasha’s death, Emily cannot prevent herself from mourning her, inexplicably feeling herself “cut off from an essential source” which she had resented even while it nourished her own neglected and
impoverished soul. Sasha’s death seems to represent, as if they had been two sides of one person, the death of Emily’s self-starved spirit.

During her brief, idyllic months with Peter, Emily had, with the “self possession of Virgil in hell” (108), exacted a terrible revenge upon her old friend for the disquiet that Sasha’s love had brought to her cold and ordered existence. Believing that Sasha had “constructed her happiness upon a delusion” (106), Emily determined to be the one to disabuse her and “to rub [her] nose in a little reality” (117). She had brutally told Sasha that her beloved Boris had been living, while Sasha and he were lovers, with an American woman. Emily had made this revelation fully aware of the pain it would cause Sasha. Sasha had been perceptive enough to realize that Emily had enjoyed inflicting the pain that this revelation had caused her, and she had confronted Emily with this knowledge. Emily, however, had felt no sense of triumph as a result of her betrayal of Sasha, only “something like a real sense of loss” (111), and it is this loss which she hopes to identify in setting down the events of the past. For Sasha, however, Emily’s treachery had become a felix culpa of sorts, since out of her pain had come an understanding that her relationship with Boris had been based not on the highest kind of love but upon a mutual sexual greed which had debased the very idea of love.

Emily’s revenge upon Sasha had failed to bring the end of what Peter had called Emily’s “thraldom” to her old friend. In her obsession with Sasha, she had begun to stalk her, following her, on one occasion, to the church where Sasha was receiving instruction in the Catholic faith. Despite Peter’s assurance that by telling Sasha of Boris’s perfidy she had only participated in a drama of passion that Sasha would have secretly enjoyed, because “nothing really matters to that kind of person” (118), Emily continues to “measure the past.” During her life with Peter, she says, “I was able to put from my mind Sasha and all of her works,” but, “still, in her way, she managed to hold her clutch upon my roots” and to “attack me in disturbing dreams” (120). Clearly, from Emily’s point of view, Sasha had played the role of a devil in haunting her and destroying her calm emotional equilibrium, but, in fact, she reveals unwittingly to the reader what Sasha had become, the voice of Emily’s stifled conscience and
repressed emotions. After her betrayal of Sasha, Emily had both longed for and feared a reconciliation with Sasha. Her need to find the meaning of her obsession had driven her toward her old friend, but her fear of contamination by Sasha's love had held her back. Finally, however, it had been Sasha's letter informing Emily of her mortal illness that had provided Emily with an excuse to visit her friend.

As she had moved inexorably closer to death and her body began to waste away, Sasha had taken on an aura of saintliness at which her younger self had hinted. Emily's cruel revelation, which might have caused a rupture in Boris's relationship with his American lover, had become for them, too, a felix culpa which had provided for them the chance for a new beginning. Rather than parting in the face of Boris's faithlessness, he and his lover, Vernon, had been touched and affected by Sasha's goodness and capacity for self-sacrifice. When Emily had voiced her bewilderment at their grief when they learned of Sasha's fatal illness — "I do not know what she could possibly mean to you, unless she has some sentimental value" (220) -- Vernon had told her,

in all my life . . . no one has ever given me anything I didn't have to pay for except Sasha. She came here with every reason, with every intention of getting revenge. . . . but this was it . . . she saw how I felt, and she couldn't manage it — revenge I mean. She gave me back Boris as much as if she had handed him to me on a silver platter, not because she didn't want him; she saw I wanted him more. (220)

Clearly, Sasha's freely given love had had the power to bring goodness out of evil, and this is what Emily is unable to understand. To Emily, love is something bought and sold with careful consideration of the risks involved. Having never willingly loved, when she gives love against her will, she sees her love as having been stolen from her. The love of others toward herself she sees as the passing on of a contaminating disease that threatens the integrity of her solitary self, leaving her victim to open psychic wounds and the ravages of raw, uncontained emotions.

For Sasha, however, Emily's cruel revelation of Boris's deceit, which might have led, in a person less committed to love, to a cynical view of human contacts, had been the occasion for a new understanding of the nature and purpose of love. In the character of Sasha,
Redmon embodies a sense of the numinous even as Emily denies its existence. For Sasha, “every commonplace [had been] punctuated with some glory,” because she had had the power to see in everything that occurs, both good and evil, the touch of a source of limitless love, of which her own was faint reflection. Sasha had told an uncomprehending Emily that she accepted some of the blame for what had transpired between herself and Boris. She had refused to see herself as the innocent victim of male treachery: “I flung myself at Boris,” she had confessed. “I went to bed with him against my conscience in order to indulge my greedy feelings. I would have to sink to the depths of utter hypocrisy to blame him utterly for what happened” (183).

In these words, Sasha had seemed to articulate Redmon’s view that the only authentic love is that which is dominated by the spirit which gives in love, holding in check the sexual component of love which, if allowed to dominate, can become a greed which overrides the conscience and extinguishes reason. Sasha had taken from her painful experience the lesson that a love that is based upon the mere indulgence of physical and romantic feeling is no more than animal appetite. She conceived, as a result of her suffering, a notion of love that involves the giving of the whole self to the other, rather than the mere exchange of physical pleasure. In asking Emily, rhetorically, if she had “never wanted to put [herself] in someone else’s shoes, feel their feelings, and think their thoughts in order to identify better with their lot” (183), Sasha had put her finger on the nub of Emily’s malaise. However, Emily had not been able to see that her failure to give and receive love lies in her inability to feel compassion. Love, to Emily, is something that once received must be guarded rather than responded to. As Peter’s lover, she had become his “wardress,” in case he decided to withdraw himself and his love. She had hoarded their love as if against a coming famine rather than sharing its benefits with others. Neither she nor Peter had been “capable of generosity,” that is, until Sasha had entered Peter’s life and touched in him a buried source of compassion. He had been terrified of emotion since his own had betrayed him by running amok and causing his breakdown. Sasha had been able to gently release his feelings in the generous outpouring of her own.
Finally, in recognizing Sasha's suffering and responding to it, Peter had been irrevocably changed.

Having once dismissed Sasha as an "empress" with "no clothes," who lived in a fairy tale world of her own imagination" (120), during the last months of Sasha's life Peter had been able, through her influence, to re-enter the sphere of human community which his unhappy childhood and eventual mental breakdown had caused him to shun. Despite the fact that everything the reader learns comes from Emily's bitter and jaundiced point of view, it becomes clear that Peter's act of generosity toward Sasha has unearthed in him a spiritual component to his character that had long been dammed up. Emily complains that since his exposure to Sasha, he "forgets his need of her[Self], that need which in the end made him beg [her] to marry him" (249). Sasha had enlarged his horizons to include much more than his own needs. He had begun to give, in his relationship to Emily, the gift of himself which, in her dogged isolation, she is determined to reject. Significantly, he had even begun to make love to Emily, "to [her] specifically, with violent emotion" which she had "allowed with [her] teeth set against it" (212, my emphasis). So repugnant is the physical manifestation of Peter's love (as opposed to the mutual satisfaction of their physical urges) that she bathes afterward, "scouring from [her] skin every trace of his feeling" (212).

So important to Emily is her privacy that Peter's attempts at intimacy (as opposed to just sex) represent an invasion. As Anatole Broyard wittily observes in his review of the novel, Emily's "privacy . . . is a kind of virginity to her, or a vaginismus" (33). As if his eyes had been opened to the suffering of others by the vicarious experience of spiritual love, Peter had become aware of the suffering of the "children downstairs," to whose poverty he had previously been quite blind. To Emily, who had allowed Peter to share her life because she admired "his subtle, sardonic manner," his "upright bearing and his cold smile" (198), the change in Peter constitutes a treacherous betrayal. Emily is unable to recognize that the change in Peter had been a result of his liberation rather than of emotional collapse. From her own perspective, Peter had taken "his mollusc heart around in his hands and offered it
around to the mercy of the world" (209). Worse, he had tried to "drag down" Emily into his compassion (211). He had unforgivably misrepresented himself to her and then "shifted ground." After the change in him, Emily reflects, "the pressure of living with Peter day and night became almost more than [she] could bear. Day and night, day and night," Emily says, "he carried his love and gratitude for me around after me, a sacrifice I longed to snatch from his hands and smash to the ground" (215).

In a conversation with Peter after Sasha's death, Emily had revealed unwittingly the root of her mortal fear of human contact. She had listed for Peter the people whom he had loved and who had then deserted him, beginning with his mother, and ending with Sasha. At the end of her speech, Peter had remarked that he doubted if Emily has ever loved anybody, to which she had replied, "I can give you something better than love. I can give you order" (246). She had gone on to ask, "which is better, then, a life made intolerable by love or a life which is tolerable without it?" (249-50). In these words, Emily had articulated the role she had assumed when little more than a child, in which she opposed everything which Sasha had represented when she had had the effrontery to take pity upon Emily and make of her a dear friend. At the end of her narrative, Emily remarks that "[her] ordered coldness is as necessary to [Peter's] life as Sasha ever was" and that their "characters deeply interlock at the point of his survival" (250). In these words she seems to acknowledge her own inadequacy and the wholeness that Sasha had brought to both their lives in the generous gift of her love, despite the hurt she had suffered at Emily's hands.

Ironically, although Sasha had died so emaciated by the nervous disease which caused her death that "her spiritual self seem[ed] to show through her corporeal self" ("Introduction to Hazzard, Ozick, and Redmon" 186), it is Emily who dreams that she is in Belsen, "sifting through a pile of bodies" until she reaches "a starved woman at the bottom of the pile" which is herself. In the image of herself as a starving woman, Emily recognizes that the "food" she lacks is the spiritual life that had sustained Sasha, despite the tragic circumstances of her life. The grace which Sasha's love had represented goes unheeded, as
Thomas Woodman has pointed out, because it "points to an ultimate dimension, an area of mystery" (144) that Emily, in her stony desire for order and simplicity, refuses to acknowledge. Emily's narrative combines her need to justify herself with a determination to plumb her memory for the root cause of her unhappiness in order to "demystify" the past. However, dry reason cannot explain or account for the complexity of human life and, rather than submit to glorious chaos, as Sasha had done, Emily chooses order over the uncertainties of love and human community.

The life principle of the central character, Beatrice, in Redmon's 1979 novel, *Music and Silence*, is also based upon a fastidious avoidance of involvement in the lives of others, although, as a practicing Catholic and physician, she is prepared to use her skills and advantages for the benefit of those in need. However, she stops short of the kind of involvement that might threaten her self-contained life which is "simple to the point of being stark" (3). Forty year-old Beatrice Pazzi – does Redmon playfully intend the surname to suggest the slang word "patsy," which means scapegoat? It is hard to tell – lives alone in a London flat. She is the daughter of an exiled Italian family which had returned to Rome after the death of its patriarch, Beatrice's father, much to Beatrice's relief. Beatrice's Latin heritage, particularly her mother's tendency to emotional "excess," is something that she is eager to discard. Since her mother's and sister's return to Italy, Beatrice has felt as little real connection with her family as possible, stopping short of outright rejection of them. "Duty had served" for Beatrice, "and she had done it cheerfully to profit her soul" (39). Since she was jilted by her first and only beau whose excuse, produced, tellingly, in "the back seat of a car," had been that she was "too much of an angel for [him]" (38), emotional demands upon Beatrice have been minimal and she has been able to live an uncluttered, exemplary life. In fact, Beatrice's problem -- the name means "blessed, "according to Redmon ("Interview" 328) -- is that she has been "always and everywhere . . . too much of an angel for everybody! She'd been the family saint" (38). Accordingly, Beatrice lives an uneventful life, (until the moment when its peace is shattered by the scream from the young 'cellist in the flat below hers),
ministering to the cancer patients at her hospital and conscientiously participating in the rites of her faith. If Beatrice is disturbed by a sense of her foreignness, she copes with it adequately by living the life of a respectable British professional and avoiding excesses of emotion while bestowing a genteel compassion upon those who are in her professional care.

The girl whose cry of fear brings Beatrice running to her aid is a young 'cellist named Maud who has inexplicably stopped playing the music that had charmed and soothed Beatrice in her flat above, and who has almost destroyed her flat and its furnishings in a fit of rage and despair. Maud explains that she has attracted the attention of a fanatical born-again evangelist, Arthur Marsdan, who has made her the focus of his crusade to “save” the ungodly. To emphasize the spiritual focus of the novel from its beginning, Redmon has Maud remark to Beatrice that she had “let her in – just as I let that man in – because you both believe in God” (11). Thus, Beatrice’s and Arthur’s modes of spirituality are juxtaposed from the start. This is, in fact, just one of many juxtapositions -- such as the contrast in character between Emily and Sasha, whom Redmon has said are two aspects of the same person (“Interview” 330) -- that characterize Redmon’s fiction in the working out of her vision. As Arthur flees down the staircase past Beatrice, she fears for a fleeting moment, from the violence of his expression, that he will kill her. However, in this encounter with Arthur, unlike in her second, Beatrice survives.

Once Beatrice enters Maud’s flat it becomes clear to her that much more than her encounter with the self-styled evangelist has caused Maud’s distress. She tells Beatrice that her unhappiness has been caused by the betrayal of someone she loved and that she has “broken with everybody” (12). Beatrice suggests that if she cannot play, then perhaps she should write. Thus, Maud begins the journal which provides an alternating voice with that of an omniscient narrator, thus creating, fugue-like

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In her article, “The Fugal Procedure of Music and Silence,” in Contemporary American Women Writers, ed. Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick, Catherine Rainwater provides an insightful and interesting examination of the complex structure of this novel in terms of the musical form of fugue.

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and a distinctive response to human artistic experience" ("The Fugal Procedure of Music and Silence" 70) are skillfully intertwined. As Beatrice struggles to understand her obsessive thoughts about the young musician and to overcome her reluctance to involve herself in Maud's life, Maud sets down the events which had led up to her break-down in an effort to heal her "broken heart" and return to her music. Meanwhile, a further strain is added to the narrative by Arthur Marsdan's sinister obsession with Maud. At the end of the novel, as Beatrice moves toward an understanding and perhaps a consummation of spiritual love, including its sexual manifestations, with a colleague from her hospital, Benjamin Rose, she is murdered by Arthur Marsdan as he tries to break into Maud's flat in order to kill the young violinist. The novel ends with the final entry to Maud's journal in which she tries to explain the meaning of Beatrice's sacrificial death and the role it has played in her recovery.

Until the moment when Beatrice "step[s] out of character" to become involved in the problems which beset Maud, she had been smugly content with her life. Having spent half her life dealing with the melodramas of her highly emotional family, she had 'slipped" into a life of solitude and simplicity in which her days were spent at the hospital and her nights passed in contented solitude in her flat. So great is Beatrice's love of seclusion, she has wondered "if she wasn't becoming a little unbelievable to want, as she seemed more and more urgently to want, a relationship with thin air, but then the air wasn't so thin at all, but thick with presence, almost gravid with possibilities which had hitherto occurred only to a kind of intellectual faith she'd had" (41). As this passage makes clear, Beatrice's spiritual awareness is very strong. She is, as Redmon herself remarks in an interview with Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick, "very close to God" and "she has an expectation, coming as she does from a Catholic tradition, of what God wants from her, and in this way, she sort of invents Him" (326).

The God which Beatrice has invented for herself communes with her in the quiet of her flat, seemingly requiring of her nothing more than conscientious obedience to the tenets of her Catholic faith, the employment of her medical skill in the care of the sick, and frequent contemplative prayer. However, Beatrice is to learn, in the act of reaching out to Maud in her
unhappiness, that "[God]...has invented her," and "her process is to divest herself of all the prim clothes she wears as a defense against standing naked before her maker" ("Interview" 326, my emphasis). Beatrice's journey takes her from comfortable, self-congratulatory piety to the front line in the battle between good and evil, even to the sacrifice of her life for another. However, Redmon is quick to avoid any sense of miraculous conversion in Beatrice's case. She tells her interviewers that Beatrice "would not have got to this stage [of allowing God to strip her of her pretensions] unless she had first made an unaffected effort to obey the tenets of the Gospels" (326). Beatrice "had been chosen by God for the contemplative union that she and God achieve at the end" [in the sacrifice of her life], but according to Redmon, it is Beatrice's freely chosen "response to His choice that was her main interest in writing the novel" (324).

Shaken from her complacency by her strong feelings of affection for Maud, Beatrice longs to return to the comfortable, impersonal kindness she had previously cultivated, which had allowed her to retain her solitude and inner peace. However, she realizes that she had loved Maud even before she had met her, having made an emotional contact with the girl through the glorious sound of her music. As Catherine Rainwater suggests, in Redmon's view, "art can unite people, bridge loneliness, and even awaken higher sensibilities, as Maud's 'cello playing seems to do for Beatrice" (DLBY 322). As Beatrice struggles home in the rain with the bags of (far too much) food she and Maud have bought together, having cancelled a weekend in the country to be with Maud, she agonizes over her uncharacteristically strong feelings:

It was quite infuriating to know one was in the grip of an obsession and not be able to stop oneself. Had she [like Arthur Marsdan] Messianic delusions? Oh save me, save me! She, rescuer, and saint, saint, saint; which was all very well if nice and impersonal and it was all an obvious sacrifice: a sacrifice she felt every time she got up at a quarter to six, a sacrifice she felt when going without for others. This surely couldn't be sacrifice, this degrading, despairing hope for someone else. (102)

Redmon explains Beatrice's obsession as God's way of pulling her up sharply in her complacent certainty that she knows his will for her: "[He] told her, 'You stop here. You are
helpless” (325). Having been influenced by the writing of St. Theresa of Avila, Redmon believes that “to be too confident about the will is surely to attempt to limit God’s power and creativity” (“Interview” 325). Beatrice is to learn that much more is required of her than the safe and comfortable faith which has so long sustained her but which has lulled her into a sort of spiritual torpor.

Like Emily Stone in her anguished search for the reason for her obsession with her friend Sasha, Beatrice is tormented by her feelings for Maud. What has “so drawn her to Maud’s threshold? What had made her care?” (84-5). Like Emily, she explores the possibility that her obsession with a woman may have its roots in a sexual proclivity for her own sex. Determined to be scrupulously honest, Beatrice asks herself, "was [sexual love] what she hungered and thirsted for in the dark? Did she want to touch [Maud]? She made herself imagine this. Something superficial in her wouldn’t have minded the folds of the clothes, the hair; but balked with a repugnance – convincing in that it was mild – at final contact” (145).

Nevertheless, Beatrice fears that she may be “due for a dreadful unveiling of motive” (145). Instinctively, she assumes that her obsession signals something wrong in her, and she searches through her memory of the past for clues to its origins. She remembers having been an earnestly good schoolgirl who had not known how to play. She had endured the teasing of her peers for her “foreignness, fatness, and strangeness,” and an adolescence that had been “a psychic scream: a long, pressed, suppressed agony of need and guilt. She’d thrashed in agonies of love, blinked back tears at phone calls for [her sister] Tatty not for her” (145). Although she is beautiful, Beatrice has never excited strong feeling in anyone. Despite her goodness, Beatrice has been liked but never loved. “There had been no love affairs,” she admits, “but there had been dreadful crimes (at times) of thought and feeling” (146). Her thoughts passing from her childhood to more recent memories, she sees herself to be suffering from a “sickness” which she connects with an “incident by the river” she had experienced six years earlier.
In her soul-searching, Beatrice perceives a connection between her feelings for Maud and the emotion that the incident beside the river Thames had evoked in her. She had been taking a stroll and had stopped in the middle of Lambeth Bridge to stare down into the water when she had seen the naked, floating body of a drowned woman being removed from the water by river police. The image of the woman's "breasts engorged with water like a mother's with milk" had seemed to communicate to Beatrice something profound about the nature of death that her years as a physician had not taught her. She had always thought of death as possessing "an orderly contained quality," and therefore as something which she, orderly, professional, and outwardly composed, "was competent to deal with" (148). The evident violence of this woman's death, however, had shown Beatrice, that for all her charity and competence, her cloistered goodness would be inadequate against the chaos of life outside her own clinical, ordered life. Despite her medical skills, "she could do nothing for the woman in the water, but to pray for the woman in the water. The depth of passivity of deadness and nakedness, the helpless immodesty before men's eyes, the complete privacy at the same time of the woman, the sudden end of whatever emergency had thrown her into the water, the spontaneity of it all" (148-9).

When the woman's red hair had fallen back and she had seen that "something had picked out the woman's eye" (149), Beatrice had felt that she was being shown, in the image of the dead woman's missing eye, that there was something lacking in her own moral vision, in her neat and careful goodness. She had cried out in frustration and shame that she surely "lived a blameless life," knowing somehow that the body of the woman was her own, the exposed breasts her own, engorged with the unexpressed milk of a Christ-like and passionate involvement in the pain of others. She had given, not what Christ had given — his self — but "Brompton mixtures and advice" (149), taking care not to allow her tidy life to be infected with human suffering. The image of the dead woman's engorged breasts had become, for Beatrice, a symbol of something she herself withheld, the sense of which she had carried within her ever since. Although she has regularly confessed her sins, the "initial satisfaction"
had worn off, leaving her with a sense that only she was ignorant of what was "missing" -- just as the woman's eye had been horribly missing -- in herself. To others, she felt, her fault was as exposed as if she were naked.

Beatrice has always believed that marriage and all that union with another involves is somehow "not for her," in spite of her passionate nature. She has found solace for her loneliness in her close relationship with God and in scrupulous adherence to the tenets of her faith. Beatrice's peace is shattered however, when Maud enters her life. The image of the drowned woman and her impulse to help Maud coalesce, the "connection lock[s] in," and she knows that God is calling her, through Maud, to give much more than the clinical kindness she has given in the past. He is asking her to step out from the safety and comfort of her solitary existence and to risk her very self. In answering that call, Beatrice begins the process that will lead, in the end, to the sacrifice of her life for Maud. Having constructed herself in opposition to all she dislikes in her volatile, emotional family, Beatrice is challenged to take on an individuality that has been tailored to the needs of a greater vision of human life, one which requires spiritual love, rather than charity, in the working out of its purpose.

While she is coming to terms with the strong emotions she has for Maud, Beatrice has the opportunity to explore her sexual feelings in a relationship with Benjamin Rose, a Jewish heart surgeon who has fallen in love with her from a distance. Like Beatrice, Ben is wary of human contact. He is "utterly friendless" by choice, but capable of a passionate, if cerebral, love. Before he had "fallen ill" with Beatrice -- like Emily Stone, Ben had tended to think of love in terms of affliction -- he had fervently loved "another devoted servant of the lord," despite, or perhaps because of, her "dedicated plainness" and "ruthless virginity" (193). Ben is a man of such delicate sensibility that he had vomited after a casual sexual encounter in a parked car. The fervour of his growing obsession with Beatrice, as she coolly ministers to the sick, enables Ben to overcome his reticence and to approach her. Together, they embark upon a relationship in which each reaches timidly toward the other in a rapidly deepening love. For Beatrice, being with Ben is like "coming round from sodium pentathol" since she "hurt the
more for the curious man . . . who woke her up" (205). Their shyness and shared habit of celibacy, however, creates an awkwardness between them that neither has the confidence to overcome.

Yet, the love Beatrice feels for Maud enables her to break through her resistance to personal involvement. Love for Maud acts as a precursor for a new and different kind of love. She is “suddenly . . . struck by her former evasions” and wonders how one could “fail to work out the equation of self and others once it had been presented” (203). She looks ahead to the challenge of her cultivated and comfortable chastity that Ben will sooner or later present. For Beatrice,

it would be hard to retreat from what she now saw she wanted to know of herself. Ah, it was cruel to have to face the inferences that glinted round the events of the past few days [of her friendship with Ben]. Was it the good God's meaning that she should see herself locked and bolted?Withdrawn into barrenness and not virginity at all? She did not know what He meant any more except that she had taken Him for granted and at face value all her life treating Him in some senses like a fool of a bureaucrat with a rule book. (207)

In Beatrice's soul-searching, Redmon explores a central concern of her fiction, that there is a world of difference between the virginity which involves the dedication of oneself to God, at the cost of human sexual intimacy, and the dry chastity which is a means of escape from the demands and risks of human intercourse. Beatrice sees that she had chosen celibacy because it suited her and then expected it to count for virtue. “I've been afraid all my life of loving anyone,” she tells Ben. “I've lived the safest life imaginable” (213).

The gulf between Beatrice and Ben, which has been created by their fear of physical intimacy, is bridged by the sharing of their innermost concerns. With a relief like the bursting of a dam, Beatrice pours out to Ben her fear of what her love for Maud may represent. Ben's understanding response – “you're afraid you're in love with her” (213)" is at once liberating and affirming for Beatrice. She has risked the intimacy of shared confidences and survived. The experience enables her to make sense of the unarticulated yearning that has haunted her since her obsession with Maud had set her emotions in a turmoil. She explains to Ben:
Sometimes I think everyone in the whole world is starving — starving. I gave my life to medicine hoping that would feed. I give no end of my salary to the poor — you don’t know. Are you shocked? I am slammed up against a sort of hunger in [Maud] — in myself, even, perhaps, in you, Benjamin... that can’t be fed with money or pills or even roast turkey: that is the necessity! If sex could fill it, well, then why doesn’t it? Casual observation proves it doesn’t. Or if it does, it does so on a fairly short term basis. ... Love seeks to fill an insatiable need, the heart craves to be fed with something more than you can touch. I myself need what I crave to give. I never knew it or saw it before I met that girl and it’s put me in a stinking dilemma I can’t solve. How can I give her or anyone else or myself anything more than I’ve given? (214)

The image of physical hunger that Beatrice employs in the “outburst of emotion it has taken her forty years to achieve” (214) constitutes an extended metaphor in Redmon’s fiction.

Physical appetite, or the lack of it, is used often by Redmon to reveal her character’s capacity for love. Those who are fastidious or abstemious in love seem often to be disinterested or disgusted by food, whereas those who eat greedily, as Sasha and Boris do in the Russian restaurant, seem to have allowed the sexual component of love to overpower the spiritual. Amusingly, as Beatrice “thaw[s] into her ravioli” during her evening with Ben, she finds herself “absolutely starving.”

Neither Ben nor Beatrice knows how to cope with the sexual tension that has grown up between them. Beatrice assumes that Ben’s “ardour” will “consume” her, thus absolving her of the responsibility of making a decision. Ben, however, cannot “touch” her, nor she him. Yet, in admitting their inability or reluctance to consummate their relationship and in their acceptance of the situation, curiously, Beatrice and Ben find themselves relaxing into a love which transcends the physical and which exposes the deeply buried fears and hurts that had held them back from loving. For Ben,

it came. Coldly sluggishly, spreading and numbing, not the memories [of the holocaust] he’d already recounted, but their meaning. The little ice-thorn pinched, the splinter of death drove its meaning home where you lived in the splinter and not it in you, foetal, ungrown, sucking and unsatisfied — eternally unloved, unwanted you. Something shrivelled you so you could only love in two dimensions that made interesting patterns in your pale grey frozen sac. And sex was relevant to it only in that it’s something that should be done with your whole self which you’ve never before possessed enough to give. (226).

In these words, Ben articulates Redmon’s contention that a “false dichotomy has been set up between the spirit and the senses” (“Interview” 334). According to Redmon, the expression of
sexual love should not be separated from the spiritual since both are part of the impulse to
give the whole self to the other in a love that ultimately transcends both. Emily Stone, for
example, tries to separate the two kinds of love by rejecting the spiritual and satisfying her
bodily desires as if they were merely an itch to be scratched, or a meal grudgingly eaten to
sustain life and strength. Sasha, on her part, had convinced herself, in her relationship with
Boris, that their sexual greed for each other had been evidence of their great love for each
other, until Emily had made it clear to her that Boris's love had been less exclusive than she
had thought.

Ben's revelation of his innermost self to Beatrice serves to break the barrier of reserve
between them. As Beatrice tells it, Ben had bury his head in her lap and, "together they
shared a physical anguish while they talked and talked . . . and pulled out of each other all
sorts of burning shames, crushings and mutilations . . . their arms tangled about each other
awkwardly" (227). The following day, as Beatrice mulls over the events of the past evening,
she wonders if she and Ben will marry. Finally, she decides that she is content to wait and
see. What seems important to her, at this point, is the fact of "the knowledge she could cope
with being all there" (229). In this rather ambiguous statement, Beatrice seems to refer back
to Ben's words when he had talked, the night before, about the sexual act being one which
should be "done with your whole self" only when you possess it enough to give. She seems to
acknowledge, here, that she no longer feels the need to repress her sexual feelings, or to
sublimate them in good works and the rituals of piety. As a result of her love for Ben and of
his for her, she is now "all there," whole enough to give her whole self in the spiritual love
which includes the sexual, when - and if - their relationship progresses as far as marriage.
They will just "have to see" (229). It is enough for now that the hard knot of her "refusal" has
been softened by her contact with the beloved "other" in Ben. "Cleanliness," Beatrice ruefully
reflects," had not been Godliness after all" (231).

The nature of Beatrice's love for Maud is more complex and difficult to fathom than
that of her love for Ben. In her insightful essay entitled "Infanticide and Other Ways of
Mothering in Anne Redmon's *Music and Silence,* Elizabeth Ammons characterizes the “fault” for which Beatrice searches her soul in anguish as avoidance of the responsibility to care for another life (343). According to Ammons, like Hawthorne’s Arthur Dimdusdale, in *The Scarlet Letter,* Beatrice tries to take care of people collectively, in groups, he as a minister of the Church and she as a physician. Both do this in an attempt to avoid the pain which human contact involves. As Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick put it, Beatrice “seeks a pure spirituality which she mistakenly considers separate from flesh and feeling” in an attempt to “escape emotional entanglements with human beings who cause so much pain to one another” (“Introduction to Hazzard, Ozick, and Redmon” 187). Elizabeth Ammons equates the kind of pain which Beatrice wants to avoid at all costs with the pain of childbirth when she argues that individuals such as Beatrice (and, perhaps, Ben) are suffering from a “glaring self-division, in which the idea of human transcendence has been severed from its physical base which is sex and the terrifying act of birthing and caring for another person” (343). Thus, in loving and caring for Maud, in “bonding” with her, Beatrice is mother to her in a process that gives birth to herself, too, as a whole person with nothing held back, nothing “refuted.” In the light of Ammons’s argument, the engorged breasts of the drowned woman whom Beatrice sees hauled from the water symbolize the withheld personal love which is essential to spiritual growth and health, both in the lover and in the beloved. As one of Mary Gordon’s character’s perceptively notes, “whereas people don’t mind loving others for the love of God or humanity, no one wants to be loved only because of a general, undiscriminating love” (*Final Payments* 97). This, incidentally, is the nature of love that ideally exists between mother and child, a personal love which, in Maud’s life, has been sadly lacking since her own mother’s insanity had prevented her from loving and nurturing her two daughters.

Maud, the object of Beatrice’s obsessive concern, has had a tragic life, her account of which provides the sub-plot of *Music and Silence.* Between the omniscient narrator’s account of Beatrice’s struggle to understand her obsession and of Arthur Marsdan’s steady descent into religious mania, the journal which is Maud’s attempt to heal herself provides a sort of
counterpoint to the main story. As she hides in her rooms, unable to play her 'cello or to shake the depression that grips her, Maud begins her journal by stating her pessimistic view that she is helpless against the destiny which controls her life. She has had, she says, "the distinct impression that my end was completely predetermined by my beginning" (17). She is sure that she will die at the hand of the religious maniac who stalks her, and senses, in an ill-defined way, that she has somehow earned such a fate. It is not surprising, in view of Maud's horrific childhood experience, however, that she should feel so strong a sense of helplessness.

Maud's journal reveals that her mother had "lost her mind" and had hanged herself from a window within full view of her small daughter, and her father, a gynaecologist, had had only an "absolute scorn" for the three women in his life: his wife, his daughter Maud, and her sister Amy. Remembering his cold clinical approach to his family, Maud writes:

O, my Papa, oh, Sir Giles Eustace, doctor of a high degree with your medical nose! You treated the gynaecological uproar in women through rubber gloves and at one remove. Aborting, tying off, searching through a speculum what you didn't understand in a way which refuted all mystery so that even Amy, Mummy and I were reduced in your mind to specimens! (19)

He had not been willing to provide for his family even the impersonal, generalized kindness that Beatrice gives to her patients. He had reduced to the status of mere laboratory samples those to whom he owed a father's love and affection. Maud records in heart-rending detail a trip to Europe that she and her smaller sister had taken with their father, during which he had dragged the severely sick Amy from monument to museum with callous disregard for her suffering. The little girl had wondered aloud to her sister if her father would let her die, as he had their mother. The journal she undertakes to write at Beatrice's suggestion, however, represents Maud's attempt to "prise [herself] at least from willed hopelessness," since "the mere attempt to sort things out is an investment in the future" (18). In her journal she chronicles her obsessive relationship with Thomas Alba and Ilse, his wife, from its beginnings in her unhappy childhood to the moment when the malevolent Ilse had shattered her illusions and calculatedly precipitated Maud's eventual breakdown.
While Maud had been a young girl, her aunt had introduced her to Thomas Alba, a world-renowned 'cellist, whose kindness and interest in her as a budding musician had made a lasting impression upon the affection-starved child. Looking back, Maud sees that Alba's kindness had been "too good to be true" (42). He had given her her first 'cello and, from the moment she had begun to learn to play, she had "tunnelled the music through to him." Maud had been "a calligrapher of music with those thick black strokes of tone describing formal profundities of sound to the one who listened . . . Alba" (43). In her childish fantasies she had talked to Alba in bed at night. She remembers imagining "he'd sit and listen and smoke his cigar and stroke [her] hair and close [her] eyes and leave the room with the door half-open because [she] was afraid of the dark" (43). In her child's immature mind, Alba had seemed to replace her own cruel father, and had, perhaps, in his seeming extraordinary goodness, become her god. Certainly he had seemed to direct her fate by buying for her the instrument the playing of which it would become her life's work to perfect.

As a young professional 'cellist, Maud had "had love affairs with nearly anyone [she] could lay hands on" (70), perhaps seeking in promiscuity the love and affection she had lacked as a child. Tellingly, the men she fell in love with "time and time again" were musicians – "personifications of sound" – with whom she tried to re-create the profound contact through music that she had experienced with Alba. When, as an adult, she had been reunited with Alba, the adoring and grateful love she had felt for him as a child had fused with her adult passion to create an obsessive love that was to hold her in its grip until Ilse's dramatic (and, it had turned out, false) revelation of Alba's wartime activities destroyed the illusion of him that Maud had so loved.

Maud had been reintroduced to Alba during a period in which she had been playing in a classical quartet and conducting an affair with its married leader. Her aunt had invited Alba to tea as a birthday present for her and, as he had slowly "unwrapped" himself from his winter clothes, Maud had become the helpless "victim," as she saw it, of love. She had, in her own words, "stood intoxicated, oozing love" (105). During this meeting, Alba had offered to help
Maud prepare for her musical debut -- her "Wigmore" -- and, thus, their relationship, the many hours alone during which they had played their 'cellos together in Alba's attic studio, had begun. Because Alba had been remote and somewhat inscrutable, it had been easy for Maud to convince herself that he knew and understood her feelings for him. She had half-convinced herself that her love was reciprocated. In reality, Maud had projected upon Alba the positive feelings about herself that his interest in her musical development had engendered in her. Looking back, Maud sees that he had been "[her] mother and [her] father and the only homecoming [she'd] ever had" (106-7).

Caught up in her obsession with Alba, Maud had quickly severed all other human ties. She had given up her place in the mediocre quartet led by her married lover, Maurice, for the heady promise of musical perfection implicit in Alba's offer to teach her. Maud confesses: "Being chosen by Alba -- choosing Alba -- had for me the holy aspect of eternal commitment," although she had later painfully learned that "he had no such sense of [her]" (118). In her almost mystical union with him, she had "become less and less burdened by the physical necessities." She remembers: "my appetites regressed and seemed remote. I ate randomly and slept little. Sex seemed a little perverse. I forgot I'd had it and I didn't miss it" (125). She adds that it had been as if Alba had drawn her "most tenderly in and -- never touching [her] -- touched [her]" (126). One evening, however, Maud had invited Alba to her flat, hoping, by an open declaration of her love, to introduce a sexual component to their relationship. When Alba had refused, hinting that such a development would hurt her (173), Maud had been relieved and grateful, sensing that some sort of danger had passed. It had been as if Alba had passed a test of some sort, proving that their love had reached so sublime a pitch that sexual expression had become unnecessary.

In the subplot of Maud's "love affair" with Alba, Redmon provides a parody of the kind of transcendent love which is her ideal and which the love between Beatrice and Ben represents. Through this parodic device, Redmon throws into relief Beatrice's relationship with Ben, which is based upon a mutual sharing of pain and inadequacy rather than on
fantasy constructed out of desperate need. Beatrice’s obsession with Maud, for which Ben’s love provides a cure, is based upon her fantasies about the young musician whom she romanticizes from a distance as Maud’s music drifted up through the floor between their flats. Similarly, Maud’s love for Alba had been the function of fantasies of love, affection, and affirmation that her deprived childhood had made necessary. The effect of the parody is further enhanced by the similarity between Alba’s remote goodness and the clinical kindness that is Beatrice’s response to the Christian call to love – her response, that is, until the arrival of Maud in her life. As Elizabeth Ammons has noted, both Beatrice and Alba had led “restrained, chaste lives which [were] superficially the epitome of virtue in this world (literally above it all),” but “they [were] horribly cut off from full personal involvement in the lives of their fellow creatures” (350). However, while Beatrice is able to overcome her repugnance of involvement in the suffering of others, Alba had remained locked within himself, unable or unwilling either to disturb the mirage of reciprocated love which his silence had encouraged Maud to create, or to save Maud from the treachery of his cruel wife.

As Redmon herself has acknowledged, Ilse Alba is “the most elemental character [she] ever created.” She personifies, according to Redmon, “the negative energy in the creative personality” (“Interview” 339). In terms of Maud’s search for a replacement for the mother who had deserted her by retreating into madness and finally, into death by suicide, Ilse represents the cruel witch of folklore who entices children with promises of candy only to devour them when they succumb to the lure of her false kindness. As Ilse had pried her way into the rather claustrophobic relationship between her husband and his pupil, she had been quick to notice Maud’s terrible need and to use it for her own malign purpose. Ilse had proceeded to initiate Maud into the pleasures of rich and highly seasoned food in the erotically charged atmosphere of her ornate home. Tellingly, while Maud had half-starved herself under Alba’s spell, under Ilse’s she had become an avid gourmand of exotic food. Again, as she had in Emily Stone, Redmon uses the images of gluttony and abstemiousness to create, variously, the sexual “climate” of a scene or a vivid sense of her character’s state of mind vis à
vis the sexual. What had been for Maud an obsession with Alba had become, as a result of Ilse's deliberate manipulation, an obsession with both husband and wife. Maud is later puzzled at having "simply assumed Ilse into [her] whole fiction about [Alba] without a qualm" (44). In Freudian terms, however, it seems as if she had invested in a parallel relationship with Ilse the sexual feelings that in her rarified spiritual love for Alba could not be acknowledged. Ilse's allure had certainly been as physical as Alba's had been spiritual. Maud describes her in terms which make it clear that she had been both attracted and repelled by Ilse's dark and sensual beauty and her "arch, padded, sinuous femininity" (33). She had been confused and disquieted by Ilse's ability to be at once charming and sinister, able to bring "forth...motiveless abundant love, disturbing and maternal from her otherwise sharp and greedy tongue" (141).

While appearing to offer the motherly affection that Maud had so desperately needed, Ilse had been in reality a selfish woman, dedicated to the appeasing of her appetite for power over others. She too is linked to the image of the bloated breasts of Beatrice's "drowned woman" in that her own breasts had been denied their role in nurturing since her own child had died (possibly murdered) soon after its birth. She had delighted in destroying Maud's precarious happiness in her relationship with Alba as much as Emily Stone had enjoyed disabusing her friend Sasha of her romantic notions of Boris's love. Both women had relished the pain they were able to inflict upon others as a means of easing their own suffering. As Maud later reflects, again using the image of food, Ilse had seemed to "[hold] a sugar lump with tongs. Ilse was a sugar lover. There was syrup enough to sup in her but she had no wish to be dined on" (141). Sugar, however, is not ultimately sustaining as a nutrient, and when overindulged, it can make one sick. As Maud had later discovered, Ilse's "maternal love" had been characterized by a will to destroy those who fell under her spell.

Just as Beatrice acknowledges a sexual component to her love for Maud, Maud is aware that there had been a sexual aspect to her complicated feelings toward Ilse. Neither Beatrice nor Maud had been prepared for such a response and both are troubled by it. In her
journal, Maud remembers Ilse’s “awful” allure when, after a sumptuous lunch, Ilse had sensuously announced her intention to take a nap. There had been, Maud remembers, the mute suggestion of [Ilse’s] body, that it might be desirable for both [Alba and I] to nap with her. Such a thing with another woman had never occurred to me and never has done since. Sleep in itself I felt would have an elegant debauch in her body, in other words, that she would invite sleep down upon her like an incubus, that it would penetrate her bones with deepest pleasure. . . . I wanted [Alba]. I wanted her. I wanted myself. I can’t explain. She’d pulled my glands like toffee into gluey, sugared strands. I felt decadent, dull, burning. (170)

As she tries to explain Ilse’s effect upon her, Maud’s diction is reminiscent of that of Henry James’s young governess, in The Turn of the Screw as she attempts to find words to describe the undercurrent of evil she can sense in the atmosphere of Bligh but cannot pin down with any tangible evidence. While on the surface Ilse had been urbane and charming, she carried with her the sulphurous odour of hell which at least in part came from a cloying sensuality which had been stupefying rather than life-giving. Even Ilse’s relationship with her husband, Maud suspects, had been unwholesome, and it seems likely that Alba’s indifference to the pain that his wife had inflicted upon his pupil had been at least in part the result of his enslavement to Ilse, which seemed to paralyze his will. Like the poisonous spider with which Maud compares her, Ilse “paralyzed before she sucked” (165), and Alba had been no less her victim than Maud. Thus, Alba and his wife had “shared not only one and the same weakness of the flesh but a similar and ineffable turpitude of spirit” (189).

Elizabeth Ammons suggests that by choosing so frequently to portray the sexual component of the love between her female characters Redmon reveals her fascination with “the power and complexity of the mother-daughter bond” (355). She goes on to add that, in Emily Stone, the bond is “somewhat schematic,” whereas in Music and Silence, it is “brilliantly complex and stylized” in that the novel presents Beatrice as the virgin mother who yearns to “mother” Maud, while Maud had “just as passionately” longed for Ilse to fulfil the role of mother for her. While this is undoubtedly true, Redmon is also concerned in portraying these relationships to drive home her point that a “false dichotomy has been set up between the spirit and the senses “ (“Interview” 334) not only in heterosexual love, but in all manifestations
of the highest kind of love, which Redmon calls "spiritual love." By pointing out the sexual component of the mother-daughter love between Beatrice and Maud, and Maud and Ilse, Redmon removes sexuality from the arena of discussion in which it traditionally resides. Rather than being, as it often is from the point of view of Catholic moral law, the yardstick by which chastity is measured, it becomes a morally neutral, but natural, if "frightening" component of all human love, even if, as Ammons argues, it "does not fit exactly into acknowledged categories of love between adults" (356). Furthermore, because it exists in many kinds of love, consummation or denial cease to be the only possible responses to it.

For Beatrice and Maud, love for a woman, with its fully acknowledged sexual aspect, is a stepping stone on the way to heterosexual love. This aspect of Redmon's conception of love reminds the reader of Charles Ryder's implied justification, in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, of the homosexual relationship he had engaged in with Sebastian Flyte, that this love had been the forerunner of his love for Sebastian's sister, Julia, which in its turn had been transformed into a love for God. However, the reader does not receive the impression from Redmon's fictional narratives that she intends to challenge Catholic moral law, which forbids the practice of homosexuality. The sexual desire that Beatrice feels for Maud is sexual without being genital. Unlike Mary Gordon, who directly challenges Church law pertaining to sexual behaviour, abortion, and birth control, Redmon tactfully avoids such controversy, choosing instead to question the interpretation that certain types of Catholicism place upon traditional moral law, particularly those that fail to distinguish between purity and a prudish distaste for human contact. Redmon seeks to establish that sexual *feeling* toward the object of one's love is a natural component of the highest kind of love, one that contributes to its power and intensity. In none of the novels discussed in this chapter does Redmon imply that such feelings ought to be, or need to be, acted upon when they are part of one's love for a member of one's own gender. As Elizabeth Ammons points out, Beatrice is able to distinguish between "the sexual and the genital" (356), and it seems likely that Redmon intends the reader, too, to recognize the distinction.
Having opened herself to the possibility of human interaction in her response to Maud’s need, Beatrice is able to give herself to Ben in a different kind of love from that which she feels for Maud, one which includes the sexual and which might, eventually, have included the genital variety, too. Although their love has not been physically consummated before death intervenes for Beatrice in the person of Arthur Marsdan, it seems likely that the developing relationship between Ben and Beatrice would have culminated in marriage. As Ammons argues, despite her virginity, Beatrice fills the role of the mother for Maud since she “gives second life to her, or rebirths her, and in so doing confirms her own identity as mother” (357). Furthermore, in rushing to save Maud from the murderous intent of Arthur Marsdan, Beatrice dies in order that Maud may live. Thus, “Dr. Pazzi dies [figuratively] in childbirth” (357), and the sexual component of her love, though unconsummated in the traditional sense, has born fruit in the resurrection of Maud from the depths of despair to the hope which is evident in the children to whom she in turn gives birth. Subsequently, Maud, too, is able to fall in love and even to bear and nurture children of her own as a result of Beatrice’s sacrifice, despite the damage done to her psyche by her malign adoptive “mother,” Ilse.

Beatrice’s virgin “maternity” makes her an obvious parallel for the Blessed Virgin Mary who, according to Catholic dogma, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and, while remaining a virgin, bore God’s son, Jesus. Like Mary, whose “be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38) showed a will perfectly subsumed in the will of God, Beatrice’s “unaffected effort to obey the tenets of the Gospels” (“Interview” 326), albeit imperfectly, enables her, finally, to give all, even her life, for Maud. Thomas Woodman considers Anne Redmon “highly unusual in that, with a full awareness of the force of the feminist critique, she still wishes to affirm the image of Mary the Virgin Mother “as a “chaste, incarnating woman.” He goes on to add that, “if [Redmon’s] virgin martyr figure in Music and Silence in one way conforms to a stereotype, she is also made to redefine it, since she is seeking to come out of her isolation, including her sexual isolation, into love” (154). In Beatrice, and later in Irene, the heroine of her next novel, Second Sight, Redmon not only redefines the traditional notions of virginity,
she challenges the traditional angle of focus vis-à-vis sexual sin. If, in his novels, Piers Paul Read focuses upon the sexual sins of commission, Redmon is concerned with the sexual sin of omission, or, as Beatrice puts it, the sin of “refusal.”

As she prepares herself for the confession that, as things turn out, will be the last of her life, Beatrice is unsure how to express the sin that seems to defy categorization according to traditional notions of iniquity. How can she confess what amounts to a sin of chastity for all the wrong reasons? Recognizing her fault, Beatrice “apprise[s] herself a sinner for the first time in her life,” and “it [gives] her one hell of a shock. She apprise[s] herself as a sinner not because she had but because she hadn’t.” She finds it “really quite painful to see in her precious purity a prudery, a pride; in her well-connected spiritual life a cowardice; in a much vaunted inner life a kind of presumption; in what she called detachment a remoteness from the human race – the human race – why, after all, God had died for what she chose to snub” (231). Beatrice does not suppose that she ought to have offered up her body whenever she had fancied herself in love, but that she ought to have been open to the possibility that God might call her to a love which would include her whole self, body and spirit. Instead, she had “put nothing of herself in nothing of anyone” (231), and had self-righteously considered herself chaste.

Beatrice’s rather severe judgement of herself is softened by the narrator’s depiction of her as a woman with many of the attributes of her namesake in Dante’s Divine Comedy, although Redmon confesses to having read The Divine Comedy only after having chosen Beatrice’s name because it means “Blessed” (“Interview” 328). From the point of view of her admirer, Ben, Redmon’s Beatrice Pazzi has many of the attributes that the young Dante Alighieri found in the woman whom he had loved ardently, but remotely, in that she also fits the archetype of the beautiful, wise, and chaste woman whose goodness facilitates the salvation of others. Ben compares the effect of his first sight of his modern-day Beatrice with the power of a vision in which he had been “stunned into mental silence.” She had combined “a flawless physical grace” (195) with a thoroughgoing competence, [and] a conscientious
exactitude" (194). Despite having fallen suddenly and deeply in love, however, Ben is not blind to his Beatrice’s faults, the “unconscious primness of her mouth” and her “chaste little habits” (196). He reflects that “all the time she asserted perfection to him, she gave herself away as being less than perfect. She was less than she could be...yet he was disgusted by what he wanted her to be” (196). Thus, in Redmon’s version of the story, Ben takes on the role which Beatrice undertakes in Dante’s classic: he helps Beatrice through the purgatorio of her austere and cloistered existence to the paradiso of spiritual love.

Arthur’s view of Beatrice, as he stabs her to death, also accords with the view of Beatrice which Dante’s epic poem provides. She seems to him at once beautiful and pure as she confronts him in the seconds before the fatal plunge of the screwdriver, so that he realizes that he has been "never so touched by beauty, never so touched or moved by anything so beautiful in his life. Never was there such a creature as this one who was like violets; never was there anyone like this one clothed in white, her eyes wide open and afraid and grave. . . . She almost seemed to love him. . . . She loved him he was sure" (244). Like Dante’s Beatrice, Beatrice Pazzi seems to convey with her eyes the message, “I am Beatrice, come from where I crave / To be again, who ask this. As love has willed, / So have I spoken” (The Inferno of Dante 2. 57-59). Redmon borrows from the three-tiered, vertical structure of Dante’s Divine Comedy, to suggest, in Music and Silence, the location of each of the characters in terms of their relationship to life. As Arthur emerges from the “inferno” of his vigil in the undergrowth of the communal garden and, with murderous intent, climbs the stairs to Maud’s flat, Beatrice descends from her antiseptic paradiso to engage with evil on the battle-ground of her own body. She combines, in the moment of her sacrificial death, the human love that her involvement in the lives of Maud and Ben has engendered, and Christ’s “wounded, personal, passionate love” (233). There is, in Redmon’s theology, no paradiso possible on earth. Beatrice’s secluded heaven had been a cowardly escape from the purgatorio of human life in which she is called to share with passion and vulnerability, the suffering of others.
In giving her life for Maud, Beatrice seems to answer the anguished question which Arthur has asked of Maud at the novel’s beginning, “where is the foot of the cross?” (13). The foot of the cross seems to be at the point where human and divine love meet in the phenomenon that involves the whole person, both body and spirit and that Redmon calls “spiritual love.” The scene which best depicts Redmon’s view of “spiritual love,” and which portrays Redmon’s belief that chastity need have nothing in common with “sexlessness” (Woodman 154) also shows the way in which Beatrice beats a new path away from the remote, unapproachable archetypal beauty and goodness which Dante’s Beatrice represents. As she and Ben come to terms with the sexual attraction which each feels for the other but which neither is ready, yet, to express, Beatrice feels her body permeated by a warmth which comes from her acceptance of this component of their love. Their awkwardness had disappeared as

she began to have a stride to take him into. It was odd, and she didn't know where it came from, but all at once, she saw she had a warmth. It seeped through her. Was it femininity? She relaxed back into the sofa arm and let the sensation of warmth permeate herself. Its abundance spilled out toward Benjamin. Without knowing it, she did have the most wonderful smile. (226)

Unlike Dante’s Beatrice, who remains serenely remote from the object of her ministrations, Redmon’s modern-day Beatrice is able to attain a chaste beauty that incorporates, rather than excludes, the sexual.

In her third novel, Second Sight, which was published in 1987, Anne Redmon returns to an exploration of the nature and meaning of chastity in the character of Irene, the epileptic sister of a set of twins, Durrand and Mathilde. Redmon’s Second Sight is a first person narrative in which the central character, Irene Ward, attempts “to write a full account of the events which led up to the mysterious death of [her] sister Mathilde, whose body had been found in the Gobi Desert” the summer before (7). Thus, the novel is as much a mystery as it is a memoir. In order to set down her recollections, Irene has returned to the house in Baltimore where she had grown up in an American Catholic family with her two siblings. She admits at the outset that the truth will be difficult to pin down since both her sister and brother
are dead and because her own memory has been "impaired" since the onset of her epilepsy, in early childhood. Irene laments the fact that her "experience of reality ha[s] no reality" (22). Further complicating Irene's search for the truth is the fact that Mathilde had had a tendency to interpret the past in the light of her own distorted perspective and her need to project her hatred of herself onto others, not least Irene. She tries to convince Irene, for example, that Durrand had been murdered by the leader of the lay religious order to which he had belonged, since such a theory placed the blame for Durrand's death upon the hated Companionate rather than upon herself for her betrayal of him in his hour of need.

Walking from room to room in the empty house, Irene is engulfed in terrible memories of her unhappy past. As a child, she had been doubly an outsider: first, because she had been excluded from the almost symbiotic bond shared by her twin siblings, and second, because she had learned from her brother that her epilepsy represented a sort of "Mark of Cain" which set her apart from other, decent children. Because she had been "unclean," as Durrand put it, he had hidden "everything well away from [her] contaminating disease" (9) and she had not been allowed to join in her siblings' games or share in their secrets. Consequently, Irene had grown up with a strong sense of the fate that epilepsy brings in its wake. She would not live a normal life, fall in love, or marry. She would always be an outcast, a witness to human community but never a participant. Furthermore, because her mother had been an alcoholic and therefore unable to supply the love and reassurance Irene had desperately needed, and because her father had left the family (not, as Irene had been told, because he could not face life with an epileptic for a daughter, but to pursue a homosexual relationship), Irene had had no one to negate Durrand's evil lies.

In *Second Sight*, Redmon is less concerned with obsession — unlike in her two previous novels — than with a haunting. The adult lives of both Irene and Durrand's twin, Mathilde, have been lived under the shadow of Durrand's dominating influence and, after his death, both have been haunted by his malign presence: Mathilde in her slowly collapsing mind, and Irene, literally, in a series of apparitional visitations. As Irene's "memory [throws] up
fits and jags backwards and forwards across time and space" (15), she remembers Durrand to have been a strange and brutal child. His character had combined a systematic cruelty with a curious religious sensibility which he had "adapted to suit his own needs from the Roman Catholicism into which [they] were all born" (9). Although forbidden by Durrand to cross the threshold of his room, Irene had been able to hear him "muttering imprecations" and had sensed him "feeling the silent air for some palpable vindication of himself" (9). Durrand and Mathilde had, up to the onset of adolescence, shared this "strange occult hybrid" of a religion which had to do with "zeal and pain" – Durrand is a habitual self-mutilator -- while the outcast Irene had been left on her own "to find a different and more orthodox belief" (9).

During a childhood marked by her brother's sadistic treatment and his frequently successful attempts to implicate her in his own childhood crimes, it had seemed to Irene that her sister, Mathilde, had to some extent tried to shield her from the excesses of her brother's brutality. However, in a later experience that Irene cannot fully explain except in terms of a supernatural communication from her dead brother, Irene "learned" that her sister had deliberately dropped her, as a small baby, head first upon the tiled floor of the family bathroom, thus precipitating, in all likelihood, the epilepsy from which Irene has suffered for most of her life. Thus it seems clear that the characters of both Durrand and Mathilde had been seriously flawed since their earliest years, and that in their "dark and humid" relationship they had represented a formidable force for evil. Their bond had been founded upon a struggle for power rather than on the mutual love of siblings for one another. Irene recollects that Durrand had taken "an almost voluptuary pleasure [in childhood] in having pure control over [Mathilde]" (167).

Despite their physical likeness to one another and despite the closeness of their bond, however, each twin had had a "fascination with his or her own gender" (18) that had resulted in the polarization of their characters in adolescence, as if they consciously defined themselves in opposition to each other. They had seemed to represent the warring faculties of one person, divided against itself. In the doubling of Irene's twin siblings, Durrand's austere
asceticism and Mathilde's listless promiscuity, Redmon seems to personify the body-soul dichotomy she so abhors, as she had done in the doubling of Emily and Sasha, in Emily Stone, and the pairing of Beatrice and Maud, in Music and Silence. Just as Emily had perceived her own character in opposition to Sasha's romantic sensibility, Mathilde had constructed herself in opposition to her brother, rejecting the faith of their childhood which he continued to espouse in an obsessively ascetic manner. Thus, Mathilde's struggle to free herself from Durrand's control had severely distorted her developing character, rendering her unable to interact with others except in terms of power and control. Although, in childhood, she had won the battle to release herself from her brother's domination, by the end of the novel Mathilde had lost the war when she united with her brother -- her "ultimate doom in Durrand" (74) -- in her mysterious death in the Gobi desert.

Irene's struggle, however, ends in victory, although to some extent it is for her a hollow one, since only she survives the struggle (119). In revisiting in memory her childhood experiences and the long journey into Asia she had taken with her sister after Durrand's death, Irene learns to separate her true self from the construction of her that had been her brother's evil creation, and to recognize her own value and goodness. This transformation is facilitated by the knowledge that she is, wonderfully and miraculously, loved. That she is lovable gives the lie to all that Durrand had stood for, and destroys, once and for all, the evil power he had exercised over her. As Irene says of her old home, "what shadows in this place can reprove love?" (196). Because Irene is loved, Durrand and Mathilde are "cast out and cannot enter [her]" for they have "no power over love" (196). Just as the evil that Arthur Marsdan had represented cannot withstand the love which Beatrice bears Maud, the power of John's love enables Irene to escape the dark shadows of the past that she had shared with Durrand and Mathilde.

Putting together the fragments of memory that surface as she roams through the empty rooms of her childhood home, Irene faces the possibility that there had been an incestuous element to the relationship between her troubled brother and sister. Redmon
clearly intends to use the reader’s familiarity with Poe’s short story, “The Fall of the House of Usher” to reinforce the implications of Irene’s vague memory. In Poe’s story, Roderick Usher tries to murder the Lady Madeline, his “tenderly beloved [twin] sister” (130), with whom he shares “sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature” (135). Like Roderick Usher, Durrand had fought his unnatural proclivity for his sister by adopting a "lofty and spiritual ideality" (138). While neither Durrand nor Mathilde had shown outward and physical signs of their unnatural passion for each other as do Roderick and his sister, their unhealthy need for each other had led ultimately to the deaths of both. Irene can remember no incidents that definitively confirm her suspicions, but she recalls that the twins shared "gnostic . . . inner life" had involved spending much time secluded in strange “private ceremonial.” Irene recalls an occasion upon which she had accidentally walked in on one of these odd rites, and had come away with a horrifying impression of them “slicing and drinking, their lips covered, parted and merry, with cup and candle between them” (126).

Irene also recalls seeing Mathilde, at sixteen, “lying in a pool of blood,” having had sex with a local boy in an act which Irene had sensed at the time to be a “reprisal” intended to make Durrand suffer. Although Irene is unable – or loath – to pin down Mathilde’s motive in this act, it seems that Mathilde had tried unsuccessfully to engage her brother in a sexual relationship and that Durrand had rejected her, responding to his “hidden voluptuousness” by sublimating it in an austere version of the Catholic faith which focused upon extreme mortification of the body in the interests of the spirit. Irene remembers that Durrand had had an aptitude for "hysterical chastity" which seemed at odds with the "hot, tormenting thing" which Irene believes his "sexual nature" to have been. It seems that these paradoxical characteristics had found a point of reconciliation in strange home-baked religious practices that had involved the abuse of his body.

In the character of Durrand, Redmon launches a strong attack upon lay religious organizations that she believes attract individuals of a perverse and “competitive” religiosity, such as Durrand. Durrand is the religious equivalent of Emily Stone in that while she
maintains her aloofness by fastidious withdrawal from human contact, he had withdrawn into a severely ascetic practice of his faith in which he had "spent every waking moment drilling for spiritual improvement" (39). Having been reject by the Jesuits, Durrand had joined a cult-like lay movement called the Holy Companionate, which seems to have been modeled on the lay religious organization, *Opus Dei*. In Mathilde's words, the Companionate conducts its affairs "as if the path to salvation consisted entirely through the exercise of the will, and most particularly in the conformity of the will to [its leader] Victor's own theories of piety" (157). In the Companionate, which was "like a monastic order, except all of its members worked in the world" (39), Durrand had attempted to sublimate his obviously distorted sexuality in a "frantic zeal for the numerous rules and regulations which govern even the most intimate and trivial details of the lives of the Fraternitas members" (80). However, it seems that he had succeeded only in repressing his needs for a time since he had "fallen foul of the law" during a posting in Argentina which was thought to have been due to his having "cracked up sexually" (82). Such organizations as the Holy Companionate, Redmon implies, exploit the fanaticism of men such as Durrand. Rather than leading to the "wholeness" of which Ben had spoken to Beatrice, Durrand's life in the Companionate had narrowed further his already narrow religious focus and had encouraged the "slavish emotion" which he had felt for his beloved leader, Victor.

If the vehemence of Redmon's attack is undermined by its coming largely from the mouth of Mathilde, an avowed enemy of all things Catholic, Irene's view of the order is no gentler. Seeming to speak for Redmon, she tells Mathilde that the Companionate "misses the meaning of the Church" since it "makes the Church an adulteress to Christ if it lies or arrogates power to itself beyond the power that Christ has given it" (185). Redmon's distaste for such lay orders seems to stem from her belief in the importance of free will in God's plan for salvation. Redmon believes that such organizations as the Companionate deliberately flout the will of God by severely limiting the freedom of their members to think for themselves. For Redmon, moral health is the product of free-will rather than the result of mindless
adherence to a set of rules governing the “temperature of baths” and “the length of time to be spent daily in mental prayer” (80). For Durrand, however, membership in the Companionate, with its “fasts and mortifications” had been a logical progression from the strange and secret rites he had practiced in childhood.

Without being able to put her finger upon its precipitating incident, except to say that it “had had to do with their odd games” (31, my emphasis) and with religion, Irene remembers that there had been a split between Mathilde and Durrand after which Durrand had “turned to the extreme form of pietism and legalism which was always latent in his nature.” Matty, for her part, had “turned to the life of the mind” (31). From this point on, while both had lived, Mathilde had “had a weird, passionate ambivalence about Durrand” (75), despite the rift in their relationship. She had been at once “jealous of anyone who had anything to do with him, even God,” and violently disapproving of him (75). Mathilde’s construction of herself in opposition to the austere religious values Durrand held sacred, had involved an indulgence in a promiscuous “love-life” over which “like a spider, he crouched . . . vetting suitors, [like] a pathological chaperone – or pander” (18). Although Mathilde had built a successful career for herself in the art world, it seems to Irene that Mathilde had underestimated the closeness of the bond which still existed between herself and her strange and estranged brother, until his sudden violent death while apparently trying to remove a child from the path of an oncoming train. Durrand’s death, however, had seemed to shatter the brittle veneer of order and control that Matilde had constructed during the years of their estrangement. The intensity of Mathilde’s feelings for Durrand and the strength of the hold he still has over her mind, even in her middle age, had become clear to both Irene and Mathilde herself when she lost control of her emotions, crying, “I loved him. . . . loved Durrand. . . . don’t care what he did! We were together from the moment of our conception. . . . before you even existed, we were together” (129). Mathilde’s proud and arrogant “We were” had almost parodied God’s claim to self-existence, “I am”, made through Moses to the ancient Israelites.
Curiously, in view of her hatred of all things Catholic, Mathilde had become an expert on Russian icons, images of the Mother of God. Irene reflects:

Ultimately, I do not know why my sister involved herself so deeply yet so faithlessly in the purest and most orthodox form of Christian art, but my instinct always was that it contained a vision of womanhood that Matty both hungered for and abhorred. Indeed, this is the only theory that I can muster which can contain the contradictory facts which have so tormented my reason. Now I look back on it, I think that her passionate, obsessive need for a mother who was consecrated, wise, dignified and effective compelled her towards the truest image she could find of a woman; yet, the truer it was for her, the more Matty felt the dichotomy between it and herself; and the more she felt that, the more she sensed its rejection of her, and so she ended up by rejecting it until compelled again to further pursuit. (73)

It appears that the rift between Mathilde and her twin had in turn caused a division within herself which is manifest in her ambivalent attitude toward the image of womanhood which the blessed virgin represents. In rejecting her brother’s distorted form of the Catholic faith into which they had been born, Matilde had repressed her own innate spirituality and had rather predictably adopted a sexually promiscuous lifestyle as clearly visible evidence of her rejection of the faith which had been the mainspring of her brother’s life. As all three of the novelists discussed above, David Lodge, Mary Gordon, and Piers Paul Read, have emphasized, opposition to and rebellion against the Catholic Church invariably focuses upon Church law regarding sexual behaviour. Bereft of the source of spiritual guidance and stability that the Church had provided, Mathilde had chosen a sinister form of supernatural belief. She had believed in “a terrible source of power that slumbered beneath concrete pylons and waited to be awakened” (35). “In [her] presence,” Irene remembers, Mathilde’s icons had somehow been “robbed . . . of religious meaning . . . and one was left only with an idea of inhuman strangeness over which [her] sister exercised some peculiar authority” (69).

Anne Redmon has professed an interest in both “getting rid of [sexist] images by reifying them” and in reclaiming “Christian iconography, both verbal and artistic,” in order to “help the present feminine predicament” (“Interview” 338). She finds “the Russian icons of the Mother of God particularly dignifying to women” in that “they have a gentle potency, and this enormous wisdom” (338). Perhaps, for Redmon, the combination of gentleness and wisdom
represents the feminine ideal, especially when it exists with the “purity” (as opposed to prudery) that makes spiritual love possible (335). In making her point, she refers to Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” in which the figures depicted on the urn are caught in “an eternal, unconsummated pursuit” (335, my emphasis). Redmon admits to having romantic notions about spiritual love which stem from her “fascination . . . with purity” (“Interview” 335). It seems that, for Redmon, spiritual love ideally reaches a high pitch of passion but stops short of consummation, rather like the love that existed between Tristan and Isolde. Presumably, she recognizes that such an ideal is beyond the reach of all but a small number of individuals, which is fortunate in view of the need for the human race to perpetuate itself. Such love is, for Redmon, a special calling in which individuals such as Beatrice are “chosen by God for the contemplative union that she and [He] achieve at the end” (“Interview” 324). In Music and Silence, Beatrice reaches this ideal in her virgin “maternity,” when she gives Maud life in dying in her stead. Irene also achieves this higher form of love, at least up to the last moments of the novel, as she runs toward John as he approaches her family home. In this moment, frozen in the “now” of fiction, Irene and John very much resemble the figures frozen in time upon Keats' Grecian Urn.

In Emily Stone, Redmon also uses an icon of the Virgin and Child (its absence or presence) to signal the varying states of Sasha's moral awareness. While she was growing up, Sasha had kept a candle burning before the icon, seemingly in reverence for the values of purity and wisdom which the Blessed Virgin represents. When she began her affair with Boris, however, she removed the icon since she had abandoned the virtues that Mary represents in order to satisfy the “greedy feelings” she had mistaken for love. As Sasha had slipped toward death, however, and toward a wisdom which immanent death seemed to instill, Emily had noticed that the icon had been put back. Curiously, “it added to the simplicity [Sasha] had achieved” and was the only possession of Sasha’s that remained in her once cluttered room, suggesting that Sasha had abandoned worldly values for the spiritual love found in its highest form in the Blessed Virgin.
Mathilde's attitude toward the symbol of "gentle potency" and "wisdom" that her icons depict, however, had been deeply ambivalent. The Virgin Mary of her icons had seemed to represent, for Mathilde, "an absolute feminine self which was essential and blessed" (74), the very opposite of Durrand's harsh, rigid, and militaristic nature from which she had fled. In reconstructing herself in opposition to all that Durrand had stood for, Mathilde had taken from the icons the image of quintessential femininity that she aspires to, while rejecting or ignoring, the implications of that femininity which she "both hungered for and abhorred" (73). She could "make a dissertation on the Mother of God of Compassion, but she could not embrace other people with any feeling" (72). Ironically, the body of Mathilde, partially devoured by vultures, is identified by means of the small icon she had smuggled out of Russia clutched in her hand. Despite the fact that Mathilde had reduced the meaning of religious images to the study of art, consistently rejecting the "messages contained in [the icons]" (72), Irene's innate generosity and compassion encompass the notion that, in the end, salvation might not have eluded her troubled sister.

Mathilde's ambivalent attitude toward symbols of obvious goodness, such as the Blessed Virgin, had also been evident in her mixed feelings toward her virtuous sister, Irene. During their childhood, she had alternately protected Irene from Durrand's cruelty -- fulfilling the role of surrogate mother in view of their own mother's unavailability -- and exploited her for her own selfish ends. In an "odd, complex, and almost bizarre attitude" toward Irene, Mathilde had involved her in her "internecine wars with Durrand" and had "flattered [her] with confidences and compliments, while "at other times she would reject [her] and push [her] aside" (62). She had been as fascinated by Irene's epilepsy as Durrand had been repelled by it. Her attitude toward Irene had oscillated between awe of the mysterious power to leave the body and go to another place which Irene's epilepsy had seemed to provide, and hatred for the goodness and piety in Irene which she had both despised and longed to emulate. She had frequently taunted Irene for her virtue - "Oh, St. Theresa!" (32) -- and had made "Jibes" at Irene's religious beliefs while flaunting her sexual escapades before her chaste sister. It
seems that Irene's goodness had reminded Mathilde both of the terrible deed she had perpetrated as a child in dropping Irene on her head, and of the feminine ideal that she alternately rejected and aspired to.

It is not surprising, given Durrand's cruelty and Mathilde's inconsistency toward her, and the absence of a strong and loving parental influence to counter the damage done by the "terrible twins," that Irene had grown into a woman who was distrustful both of others and of herself. Her epilepsy and her siblings' attitude toward her in her affliction -- Durrand had tried to perform an exorcism of her "devil" -- had shaped both her view of the world and her view of her place in it. Only Father Mowbray, the family's parish priest, had tried to assuage Irene's guilt and correct her misconception of her disease. He had told her that, far from being unlovable, she is, in her affliction, especially loved by God, since he had "sent [her] a great trial" (55). Thus, Irene had discovered in her faith a powerful antidote to the disturbing implications of her brother's taunting words. If her "affliction" were a sign of Satan wrestling for her soul, then God had given her the strength to withstand the devil's onslaughts. She had "learned patience; or it grew from the rod and the stem of God, and it circled the affliction like a vine, holding and choking the devil" (55). However, while Irene had made peace with her epilepsy as a result of her realization that God loved and cared for her in her affliction, she had not been able to exorcise the doubts about her ability to live a "normal life" that her brother had placed in her young and susceptible mind. Thus, until Durrand's death, Irene had lived on the margins of life, believing that her epilepsy disqualified her from human relationship and community.

Although, in adulthood, both Irene and Mathilde had to some degree come to terms with their dysfunctional childhood, the death of Durrand had resurrected the terror and self doubt that his malign influence had planted in each of them as children. Mathilde had become obsessed with her brother's memory, with the exact circumstances of his death, and with her desperate need to be reunited with him. For her part, having (coincidentally) suffered a serious epileptic seizure at the very moment that Durrand had been hit by the train that killed
him, Irene fears that "in the split second of [her] seizure the night he died, Durrand had slipped through a crack and had fed and grown like a ghastly pregnancy so that at last he had come to maturation and found entity in air" (239). On a journey together through Russia and Mongolia to distant China, Irene had been haunted by the voice and spectre of her dead brother while Mathilde had hoped that Irene would reunite her with her dead brother's spirit by means of the psychic gifts that she had always suspected are the side effects of Irene's disease. However, as they journeyed together through Asia, Irene and Mathilde seem almost to have moved in opposite directions. The journey had taken Mathilde further and further from healthy independence from Durrand and toward a renewal of her bond with her brother in death. Irene perceives that there had been something inevitable in this since "it was not love but death they wanted from each other" (196). For Irene, however, the journey had marked her liberation from the joyless fate designed for her by Durrand into a life lived according to her own free will.

As Irene puts together the pieces of the puzzle which make up her past, her narrative is framed and supported by references to "John," the man whom she had met on her journey with Mathilde, and whose love both sustains her and gives the lie to Durrand's cruel prognostications. Her return to her empty family home with its terrible memories also represents a test for Irene, and a "preparation" for her new life with John, for she must understand the past and rid herself of the ghosts of her brother and sister in order to commit herself to him. For, as Redmon has argued, understanding and memory, as well as will, define the soul ("Interview" 324). John had resisted Irene's decision to return to the house in Baltimore, worrying that the strength of her old memories would overwhelm her and make his love for her seem, by comparison, unreal. Of her family home, John says,

"it's the lion's mouth for you . . . isn't it? A personal way of self-martyrdom, going back there and risking your feelings about me with memories of Durrand and Mathilde. At the end of it, you won't believe I love you. In some obscure way I think you want to see yourself through their eyes, feel those old humiliations and believe they are true. That way you can convince yourself I will reject you, when all the time you are rejecting me. (25)"
John's fears are justified in that there is a part of Irene that clings desperately to her brother's "humiliating" conception of her character because it allows her to live risk free within the safe boundaries erected around the "afflicted." However, John had underestimated the power of his love and Irene's determination to free herself from the shadow of the past. Waking on a Sunday morning, she writes:

At first light, before I rose, there was the sense of John. Like his letters, written on flimsy paper and coming from so far away, there was something tentative about my waking to an evocation of him; but it deepened, so that, like smoke from burning leaves, he was almost embodied here, taking the place of Matty and Durrand. . . . I never expected love in life, yet now I can feel its expression even in absence and parting: waiting. (45)

The "second-sight" which had brought her such misery Irene now employs to evoke an almost palpable sense of John's love as an antidote to the malign aura of Mathilde's and Durrand's presence which lingers in the empty house.

However, Irene's liberation from the past requires more than a recognition that her brother's dark prognostications had been the products of a deeply troubled mind. In order to re-make her life she must recognize her own complicity in her brother's construction of her. As John had pointed out to Irene, in accepting the limitations of Durrand's conception of her, she had spared herself the risk of rejection and disappointment. Like Beatrice, in Music and Silence, Irene had cultivated her isolation, her sense of being different, and had used it to protect herself from the inevitable suffering that human interaction brings with it. Like Beatrice, Irene had lived a tidy reclusive life of untried virtue. In her journal, Irene writes, my previous and unconsummated relationships with men had always been hedged about with my mistrust. At some point, I would take flight – stop answering the telephone, pretend not to hear a remark which was meant to advance the situation. It was as if I had a cave prepared inside me where I would fall, and in which I would lie panicked and reclusive, until the whole thing passed. (96)

Such an attitude is understandable in one who has been taught that "no man will ever want [her]" (54). However, this "pattern" of thought is "reversed," in Irene's relationship with John, perhaps by his patience and willingness to love and accept her without reservation. Although he does not seem to share Irene's religious convictions, he recognizes their importance to her
and is prepared to respect them despite the (sexual) limitations they place upon his relationship with her, at least until they can be married. Rather than trying to persuade Irene to abandon her Catholic moral values and enter into a sexual relationship with him, John accepts that her religious convictions preclude a sexual expression of their love at this uncommitted point in their relationship.

Sexual desire is a rare sensation for the reclusive Irene. When she feels for John "a heavy stirring of desire" that is "strange for its sweetness," and ruefully brings up the subject of sex, John reminds her that if she is to have "a glimmer of hope against Durrand" she cannot afford to lose "one iota" (214) of her integrity. Clearly, John is one of those whom Redmon has suggested have the "amazing capacity to love" in a way which transcends sexuality ("Interview" 335). Like Ben in his love for Beatrice, John is prepared to wait until Irene has overcome her past and is able to give her "whole self " which, until she has thrown off the shadows of the past, she will not "[possess] enough to give" (Music and Silence 226).

The "moment of truth" that parallels Beatrice's recognition of her "precious purity" as mere "prudery," comes for Irene when the events of her unhappy past are sifted and ordered and she accepts the fact she is, after all, worthy of love. The woman who, as a child, had watched the mock marriage of her brother and sister believing that for her, as an epileptic, love would be forever out of reach, is now able to say, as if she were one of the wise virgins of Christ's parable:

I am the bride. After all these Lenten years, my Easter is prepared for me. I neither prepared for it nor expected it to come. I had no way of knowing I would dawn and become myself, no idea that I was given when conceived for this purpose. All the while I hid myself away, I was being found, and as I disguised myself, I was divulged. When I doubted most I was believed, when running was confronted.

I sense him in the night in the released power of honeysuckle. I know him as inaudible music and as imageless beauty. When he comes, I will know the day and the hour and I will be dressed to greet him. It was I who had locked and bolted the door and called it integrity; I who chose a withering virginity from a terror of love; I who regularly told myself that the ordered ritual life I led was obedience, and who built my own sepulchre — a narrow place where I conceived all goodness to consist in the avoidance of seizures and of sin. (245)
The reader senses that it is not merely the fact of John's love that has coaxed Irene from her isolation, but its quality. Because his love asks nothing and makes no judgements, Irene is freed to confront her fears and limitations, to recognize that she had been complicit in the conspiracy between Durrand and Mathilde to limit her life. She reflects: "How I needed my perilous sister to keep me in that childlike state... And how I needed Durrand too to mock and control my heart so that I never needed to risk it!" (245-6).

The cowardice that substitutes prudery for purity is a characteristic of each of Redmon's heroines in her first three novels. Although she is not a member of the Catholic Church, Emily espouses a notion of purity that is not very different, empirically, from those which Irene and Beatrice espouse in that it involves a refusal to be fully engaged in community with others. Beatrice and Irene, as Catholics, understand and accept their moral obligation to engage in charitable acts, but in their acts of kindness they carefully avoid the vulnerability which a giving of the whole self entails. Emily's distorted notion of purity encourages her to embrace what Redmon sees as the prevailing "false dichotomy" between "the spirit and the senses" (334). Clearly this dichotomous reasoning is not limited to members of the Catholic Church. Emily assumes that her purity, or what she might term her integrity, can be kept intact if she regards the sexual act as a mere exchange of bodily pleasure, or even as an exchange of physical release for money. In Emily's view, emotion and spiritual intercourse contaminate what ought to be a purely physical act, making it, therefore, unclean. Beatrice and Irene also embrace dichotomous thinking out of fear of emotional involvement, and are perhaps encouraged to do so by the high value the Catholic Church places upon purity which allows for an indiscriminate lumping together of true purity with human weaknesses such as prudery and extreme fastidiousness, which pass for virtue.

As pointed out above, Redmon does not take issue with Church teaching on the importance of the virtue of purity per se. Unlike Mary Gordon, who places the blame for her characters' sexual dissatisfaction upon what she perceives as the outdated and misogynistic moral laws of the traditional Church, Redmon holds the individual responsible for his or her
own interpretation of Catholic dogma which is, after all, a systematic interpretation of the meaning of Christ’s life and teaching. As Beatrice eventually realizes, the faithful are called to love as Christ had loved – creatively and passionately, rather than carefully and guardedly. The problem lies, in Redmon’s view, in the misinterpretation of moral law by those who seek to justify, often unconsciously, their own value system. Beatrice “cowardly supposed for half a moment that [her misconception of the true nature of purity] was due to the flawed teaching of others” (207), but eventually recognizes the thought for what it is: a feeble excuse. Rather than attacking the institutional Church on matters of dogma and moral law, Redmon argues in her fiction that the importance traditionally placed upon sins of the flesh frequently leads to a blind reverence for chastity regardless of the impulse behind it. Redmon believes that because of the very human propensity both to rely upon outward appearances and to take any shortcut to divine approval that presents itself, the moral doctrine of the Church, which is designed to guide the believer thoughtfully and prayerfully through life’s minefield of temptation and false values, can very easily become a mere list of rules. Again, the reader is reminded of David Lodge’s witty description of the moral landscape of English Catholics brought up in the pre-Vatican II era as similar to the game of Snakes and Ladders (How Far Can You Go? 6). Beatrice and Irene, too, follow the letter of the law while ignoring its spirit. As Beatrice ruefully admits to herself, such fastidious practice of the faith reduces the stature of God who is “Rex tremendae maiestatis,” turning Him into a kind of celestial lawyer, “a fool of a bureaucrat with a rule book” (207).

Redmon does not suggest that the impulse to cultivate emotional isolation represents spiritual laziness on the part of her three “heroines,” Emily, Beatrice, and Irene. Rather, she implies that each is in bondage to a sense of fate that makes her fearful of the consequences of human contact. Emily’s utilitarian childhood had taught her, for example, that safety lay in adopting a fiercely logical approach to human relationships that excludes such irrational impulses as love and compassion. Her innate coldness served to confirm for her the rightness of her choice. Beatrice had feared that she was fated to become, like her mother,
an over-emotional, manipulative, overly dependent woman, and she had constructed herself in opposition to this role-model, becoming instead, emotionally austere and self-sufficient. Before coming upon Maud, she had “withdrawn into barrenness” rather than into “virginity,” convincing herself that her choice also encompassed God’s will for her life. As Ben points out, it had been a gift that had cost her nothing, while Christ’s gift of himself had cost Him a great deal (214). Similarly, Irene had feared the rejection her brother had convinced her that her epilepsy would provoke, and had chosen chastity as a defence against the pain of abandonment. Both Beatrice and Irene had to learn that a “locked and bolted” moral life is no substitute for true chastity. Redmon emphasizes her point by having both women use the metaphor of a “locked and bolted door” to describe the cloistered virtue each had cultivated in her fear of involvement. As result of their experience of love, Beatrice and Irene realize that “a completely blameless life” (Music and Silence 149) is not enough if it does not also involve the passion and vulnerability that human community inevitably brings. Purity that is based on a distaste for humanity is, in reality, only prudery, and chastity, if merely reluctance to be involved in the life of another, is nothing more than sexlessness.

In her fictional examinations of these distorted interpretations of the virtue of purity, Redmon suggests a strong link between authentic purity and another of her preoccupations: “the question of free will and destiny” (“Interview” 323). Her belief that “a person’s attitude towards the amount of control he or she might have over destiny seems to determine his or her character and moral direction” (“Interview” 323) takes fictional expression in the lives of Beatrice and Irene. Although each woman strives after moral purity, neither can achieve it until she has shed her sense of a fixed destiny and has acknowledged the existence -- and the importance -- of free will. Until each discards the patterns of the past which she erroneously identifies with God’s will, and emerges from the safe haven of a destiny which had seemed irrevocable, neither has, as Ben puts it, a “whole self” that they “[possess] enough to give” (Music and Silence 226). In choosing to reach out toward another in love, Beatrice and Irene must deny the power of the past to direct their futures, and in the process of casting off
the assumptions of the past, each is made “whole” and capable of recognizing the limited nature of her cloistered virtue. Redmon makes it clear that, having made themselves vulnerable to love and having accepted the love of another, Beatrice and Irene arrive at an understanding that true chastity has little to do with avoiding relationships with others but a great deal to do with responding to the will of God in His call to community. While Emily remains “locked and bolted” against the demands of love, Beatrice “waits” to see if time will bring the key to unlock the awkwardness she and Ben have experienced regarding the physical expression of love, and Irene flings the bolts aside and runs out along the street to meet John.
Chapter VI

Conclusion

During the last half of this century, the process of secularization in society that began in the aftermath of the First World War has greatly accelerated. Church attendance has drastically declined and the vast majority of people in both Britain and America no longer look to religious institutions for guidance in their moral lives. An important contributor to this change has been the advent of convenient and reliable methods of birth control, particularly the pill, which has effectively severed the final link in the chain that had historically connected sexual activity, in the public mind, with a morality grounded in theology. In post-pill Britain and America, sexual activity was rapidly assigned to the sphere of personal conscience, and its already tenuous connection with the spiritual became a matter of individual proclivity. The Protestant Churches tended to respond passively, on the whole, to these changes. Since Protestant theology is largely based upon biblical exegesis, and the Bible is silent on scientific matters such as birth control, the pill was quickly accepted by the majority of Protestant denominations, although it seems unlikely that they foresaw the huge relaxation in traditional sexual morality which would ensue. As long as men and women took advantage of the new methods of birth control only within the bounds of holy matrimony, using it to space the births of their progeny and limit its number, there seemed to be nothing in the Bible to prohibit their use.

For the Catholic Church, however, adaptation to the vast changes in secular society -- particularly those brought about by the introduction of the pill -- has been extremely problematic. Unlike Protestant Christianity, Catholicism bases its dogma and moral law upon both Biblical exegesis and upon Tradition. Catholic teaching on matters of sexual behaviour is to a great extent based upon the deliberations of Church fathers who tended to interpret God's will for his people in the light of contemporary scientific knowledge which has since been proved erroneous, and notions of gender difference which, in the light of modern science and anthropology, seem decidedly misogynistic. Catholic tradition has always maintained that
"human sexuality [is] naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 479) and that these two purposes cannot be separated. On the subject of the pill the Church appeared to many liberal Catholics to have painted itself into a corner. Having proclaimed that its moral teaching represents unchanging truth, the Church found itself unable to adapt its teaching to sanction the use of a pill which would allow the faithful to enjoy sexual union without leaving the act open to the possibility of conception.

A second change, which has come about largely as a result of the widespread availability of reliable means of birth control, has been the steady erosion of gender boundaries and previously well-defined roles assigned to men and women which were based upon the traditional perceived differences between the sexes, both biological and psychological. With the arrival of the pill, the biological part of the equation changed. Women could now exercise greater choice in the matter of when or even whether to bear children, and with this reproductive freedom, the perceived practical differences between men and women were diminished. Secular society took the change well since the pill gave men almost as many advantages as it gave women. It brought in a new era of sexual freedom because, in secular society, the theological implications of the sexual act had long since eroded away and the problem of avoiding unwanted pregnancy was, by and large, the main impediment to sexual freedom. With the prospect of unwanted pregnancy and its accompanying plethora of shotgun marriages out of the way, there was little to deter either gender from enjoying at will the pleasures of the flesh. In the words of a wise and elderly gentleman in Piers Paul Read's novel, A Married Man: "the contraceptive pill. . . . changes things, doesn't it? It removes the necessary connection between physical love and procreation. . . . [people] felt that wives should be faithful so that their husbands could be sure that their children weren't by other men. Now that doesn't apply. Fidelity's an abstract commitment. Makes it more difficult to stay in line" (26).
Although it had seemed likely when Pope John XXIII announced his intention to convene the Second Vatican Council that Church teaching would be modified to allow the use of the pill, the Council, which met between 1963 and 1966, failed to provide a new directive in the matter. In his 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI dashed the hopes of most married Catholics by confirming the ban on artificial birth control and declaring contraception wrong because it “violates the good of conjugal love” and because “humans are particularly weak in the realm of sexual discipline [and] the use of contraception . . . will only promote this weakness” (Smith 328). Although the Church admits that “the regulation of births represents one of the aspects of responsible fatherhood and motherhood,” it argues that “legitimate intentions on the part of the spouses do not justify recourse to morally unacceptable means (for example, direct sterilization or contraception)” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 487).

According to Bernard Bergonzi, instead of the “resigned obedience which such a pronouncement might have prompted before the liberal climate initiated by Vatican II, there was a storm of protest. Married Catholics, at least in the western world, decided that if there was not to be a change in the law about contraception then they would ignore it” (David Lodge 34). Regarding the present situation, Robert McClory points out that, it is no secret that in the 1990s the majority of Catholics disagree and dissent in conscience with *Humanae Vitae*’s teaching on contraception. Dissenters include many bishops and the vast majority of theologians and married Catholics. They see *Humanae Vitae* as inconsistent with the Church’s evolved position on the goodness of marital sexuality and the importance of responsible family limitation in the modern world. They contend that if [the rhythm method] is acceptable, how can artificial contraception practiced for the good of the mother, the good of the married couple, and the good of existing children be an intrinsic evil? (ix)

On one point, however, the Church has been proved right: the use of artificial methods of birth control has in fact led to the widespread practice of sexual intercourse not only outside the bounds of marriage, but also as a recreational activity far removed in meaning and intent from the purpose for which, according to the Church, it is intended. Whether this is a function of human “weakness” in sexual matters or merely a natural and morally neutral consequence of the separation of sexual activity from procreation depends upon one’s point of view. Catholics
of an orthodox persuasion, such as Piers Paul Read, would argue that the Church has been
proved right in that the widespread availability of reliable methods of birth control has led to a
moral decline in matters of sexual behaviour that threatens the very fabric of society, the
integrity of the family in particular.

While Catholics have always been viewed as a distinct enclave within mainstream
society, the advent of the pill and the sexual "liberation" which followed its arrival widened still
further the gap between Church and society. As David Lodge's comic novel The British
Museum is Falling Down so well illustrates, the Catholic approach to conjugal relationships
began to seem highly idiosyncratic both to the secular eye and to the faithful who tried to
follow its precepts. Thomas Woodman puts it thus:

The culture shock of the sixties obviously at first sharpened the conflict between
Catholic mores and those of the surrounding culture. More permissive attitudes to
sexual display and behaviour increased temptation for Catholics, and at the same time
there was more prurient curiosity among the general public about those in their midst
who had such different standards and practices. But the new attitudes also inevitably
had their analogies within the Church to some degree, so that a more unequivocally
positive view of sexuality began to emerge. (156).

It is perhaps the "prurient curiosity" of the "general public," to which Woodman refers, that
has led at least in part to the commercial success of Andrew Greeley's Catholic novels.

The controversy between liberal and conservative Catholics which began as a
difference of opinion over the morality of modern birth control has developed, in the decades
since, into a broader debate between those who insist upon the absolute authority of the
Church on moral matters and those who champion the right of the individual to decide on
moral matters according to personal conscience. The debate, however, still finds its main
focus in questions of sexual behaviour. Andrew Greeley argues that

there are two possible interpretations to the powerful sexual drives in human nature.
The first is that they are sinful, and tolerable only because they produce children. The
second is that God is present in human passion as S/He is in all of creation and hence
it is sacramental. The second is the one that Catholicism now accepts in theory and
that it accepted in its liturgical practices for most of its history. The first assumes that
God made human nature evil -- a classical posture for the dialectical imagination.
Catholicism rejects this theory in principle but has followed it for centuries in its moral
practice. (103-4).
Few Catholics, even the most traditional, would argue for the truth of the first of Greeley's "possible interpretations" since even the most conservative Catholic notions of the nature of human sexuality are based upon the Thomist view that "the whole of the created universe [is] good -- including the material world, including the corporeal world" (Grisewood 286), rather than the neo-Augustinian view of sexual pleasure as a consequence of original sin. Where liberal and traditional Catholics tend to differ is in the degree to which they believe humankind can be trusted to decide for itself in matters of sexual conduct, and the extent to which the "old pietistic dualism in which spirit was exalted and the body degraded" (Grisewood 199) continues to influence the current teaching of the Church in matters of sexual morality.

Thomas Woodman argues that, at least until the late thirties, Catholic fiction gave an impression of "refusing to engage with contemporary realities" (28), and tended to be narrowly didactic. However, in the decades since, many Catholic novelists in both Britain and America have engaged enthusiastically in fictional dialogue with their fellow Catholics and with society at large, often adopting "popular modes on the fringes of the more respectable novel" (xiv) in order to address contemporary concerns. Alice Thomas Ellis has used fantasy, for example, Walker Percy has written science fiction, Flannery O'Connor has made excellent use of the grotesque and gothic modes, and Louise Erdrich imbues her fiction with fable, folklore, and native spirituality.

The four contemporary novelists whose work is the subject of this study reflect in their fiction the ongoing debate within the Catholic Church concerning the nature of human sexuality and its place in the moral landscape. Each novelist provides in his or her fiction a reflection of the controversies among British and American Catholics, and a response, albeit a tentative one in most cases, to the contemporary crisis within the Church. In terms of their ratio to one another, these writers -- two liberals (one of whom is a feminist), one traditionalist, and one whose approach falls somewhere in the middle -- reflect in microcosm the spectrum of opinion regarding human sexuality, particularly the concerns of women, which exists within the contemporary Church. Their work is also representative of the large body of Catholic
fiction written since the Second Vatican Council that it is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail.

The differing views of these four writers and the points on which they are in agreement are clearly discernible when they are explored in terms of each novelist's approach to incarnation. While all four would agree, as Father Cyprian, in Mary Gordon's novel, The Company of Women, puts it, that "Christ took on flesh for love, because the flesh is lovable" (285), each interprets differently the meaning, nature, and role of human sexuality in the light of God's choice to become flesh in order to redeem humankind. As Ann-Janine Morey points out, "the key question of incarnation" is "how does one give and receive love in the body" (1062), and this question is the main preoccupation of all four novelists in this study.

From her feminist viewpoint, Mary Gordon addresses in her fiction her belief that in the history of the Catholic Church and, indeed, up to the present day, women have borne the greater burden of the flesh since the notion that women are the root cause of sexual sin has never been successfully expunged from Catholic constructions of human sexuality. She would agree with Ann-Janine Morey, who argues that women respond differently and more urgently than men to the questions which incarnation poses because "theologically and culturally speaking [women] have never simply been in a body (which implies potential points of transcendence of physical imperative) but rather are the body, a condition that makes any other than biological achievement look like an oddity if not madness" (1062). The latent tendency within Catholicism to conceive of women in terms of the flesh and to equate the sphere of spirituality with maleness is a central concern in Gordon's fiction. Carol Iannone takes Gordon to task for responding to the androcentricity of the institutional Church by suggesting it be replaced by a "mystical and salvific feminism," a "female principle that will save Catholicism from the death of orthodoxy." She goes on to suggest that Gordon attempts "the replacement of one expansive orthodoxy by a second, much narrower one" (65).

However, what Gordon is at pains to portray in her fiction is the confusion and unhappiness which result from the still active assumption within the Church that the spiritual realm is the
prerogative of the male while women carry the major part of the burden of (sinful) flesh. Always sexually explicit, Gordon's focus has become increasingly genital in her most recent fiction, perhaps because she believes that, as Paul Giles puts it, lewdness "can put people in touch with the concrete circumstances of their human incarnation in a way that abstract science cannot" (374).

In Beyond God the Father, Mary Daly argues that "exclusively masculine symbolism for God, for the notion of divine 'incarnation' in human nature, and for the human relationship with God, reinforce sexual hierarchy" (4). Gordon would agree. She characterizes the position of Catholic women as "a terrible paradox," that of having "a body even as Christ had a body with affections, needs, and connections and yet knowing or sensing that there's this angelic realm that you might have access to if you just give up this body" (Cooper-Clark 271). Like Anne Redmon, whose female characters frequently shy away from relationship for fear of the risks involved in human community, Gordon bears witness, in her fiction, to the fact that the suppression of "the exuberant flesh" leads inevitably to "deformation" rather than "incarnation" (Morey 1061). Like many Catholic feminists, such as Uta Ranke-Heinemann and Mary Daly, rather than shifting the blame for sexual sin onto men, Gordon argues for the intrinsic goodness of human sexuality, both male and female, and its sacramental role in human relationships. In her latest novel, Spending, for example, Gordon challenges what Anne Redmon has called the "false dichotomy" between "spirit" and "senses" in the character of a female artist who conflates, in a series of paintings, the traditional ascetic image of the dead Christ and the figure of a post-coital male.

Gordon seems to construct her female characters against the traditional image of the Virgin Mary that the Church holds up as the feminine ideal. Gordon would certainly agree with Maurice Hamington that "Mary's non-sexual imagery remains the ultimate model of alienation for Catholic women" in that she is "almost vaporous in her non-sexuality and non-sensuality" (87). Isabel, Gordon's libidinous heroine in Final Payments, seems to represent Gordon's attempt to highlight the disparity between such images and the reality of incarnation for
ordinary women, which includes the irrepressible appetites of the flesh as part of the means by which human love, as a reflection of divine love, is expressed.

Gordon also attempts to dispel the notion that the functions and processes of a woman's body somehow render her unclean. In Isabel's reminiscences of her first menstrual period which in awe she had watched "spinning out from between [her] legs like a spirit" (Final Payments 111), Gordon appropriates the traditional Catholic analogical approach to link the mysterious cycles of the female body to the cyclical nature of the natural world which, according to Thomist theology, is both a reflection of God's goodness and a sign of His grace. Like the great southern American Catholic writer, Flannery O'Connor, Gordon views the natural world as the means by which God reveals himself, and she extends this view to include the body and its appetites.

However, while Gordon emphasizes the natural goodness of her heroines' sexuality, she does not exclude the notion that incarnation is God's way of entering into the suffering as well as into the joy of humankind. When in Final Payments Isabel reflects that "Christ had suffered in the body" (303), she seems to acknowledge the possibility that the privilege of incarnation is not only the means by which God's love is manifest, but also the point where God meets humankind in the suffering which life inevitably entails. Furthermore, in equating suffering with incarnation and the pleasures of the flesh, Gordon qualifies her portrayal of feminine sexuality which critics such as Carol Iannone have argued represents an "empty self-centeredness." In a rare point of agreement with the traditional Catholic novelist Piers Paul Read, Gordon acknowledges, in the character of Final Payments' Isabel, that when sexual desire is the result of libidinous greed rather than the result of an impulse of love and generosity, the body can block "the vision of God like an eclipse, like the moon off its proper orbit," and that "disproportionate" love of the body can cause pain and "make people unhappy" (250). Anne Redmon makes a similar point in the words of the saintly Sasha in her novel Emily Stone. Sasha reflects that in sleeping with her lover Boris in order to "indulge her
greedy feelings," she had brought upon herself the unhappiness that resulted from the relationship.

In her latest novel, Spending, however, Gordon's portrayal of an uninhibitedly and selfishly libidinous heroine is less easy to defend against critics such as Iannone and Read, who would argue that Gordon's portrayals of sexuality signal her approval of the contemporary "hedonistic spirit" (Read 20) rather than embody an attempt to reclaim the flesh within the parameters of a liberal Catholic understanding of incarnation. Carol Iannone argues that Gordon's fictional portrayals of Catholic women are products of her "revisionist" rearrangements of the Catholic "moral landscape" (64) which is no longer recognizable as Catholic. Perhaps Gordon would defend herself by pointing out that Spending is a satirical divertimento intended to show what might happen if a female artist behaved as selfishly as she believes her male counterparts are allowed to do (without attracting public moral sanction), rather than offering her heroine as a role model.

Ann-Janine Morey has argued for the importance of feminist Catholic writers in the struggle of women for greater recognition of their contribution and potential, both in secular society and within the Catholic Church. In her article, "Beyond Updike: Incarnated Love in the Novels of Mary Gordon," Morey draws attention to what she sees as a misogynist attitude in the literary world. She argues that "books by women, with female protagonists, are often perceived as relevant only to a female audience" (1059), while a hero such as John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom is hailed as "becoming as definitive a figure for our cultural consciousness as Mark Twain's Huck Finn" (1059)¹. According to Morey, it is difficult to imagine a female character from fiction being held up as a mirror of universality for the whole of society, whereas novels by male writers such as John Updike, with their male protagonists, are "to be read and pondered as relevant to everyone" (1059). Morey believes that novels such as Gordon's, with their feminist foci and female protagonists, are unlikely to be read in this way.

She goes on to add that men have been encouraged traditionally to consider "maleness" the "norm for human experience," and are thus unused to "reading themselves into" the fiction of female writers which deals with women's experience. Women, on the other hand, "are given an inordinate amount of practice reading themselves into male-produced, male narrated, androcentric prose" (1059).

From a feminist point of view, one might argue that Lodge's comic treatment of the adjustment of his Catholic characters to the values of the secular world is in part a function of the fact that his focus is upon male protagonists who, unlike Catholic women, move from one world that privileges their gender to another with a similar bias. Catholic women, Gordon would argue, carry with them into the secular world the "burden of the flesh" which had made life within the ghetto unfulfilling and restrictive. They find female empowerment as much out of reach in the secular world as within the Catholic enclave. For example, even in the 1970s "progressive" environment of the university campus, Gordon's heroine, Felicitas, in The Company of Women, is as obedient and deferential to her lover as she had been at home to Father Cyprian, the spiritual leader of the company of women in which she had been raised.

Like Mary Gordon, the English liberal Catholic novelist David Lodge attempts in his fiction to affirm the place of human sexuality within the Catholic notion of incarnation. At the beginning of his career as a novelist, Lodge took up the question of how one gives and receives love in the body by pointing out the anxiety and indignity which the Church-sanctioned rhythm method of birth control involves, and the damage such worry and tension cause to the marital harmony which it purports to foster. Later in his literary career, as Lodge reexamined his faith in the light of the growing tension between the absolute moral law of the Church and private conscience, Lodge's fiction has focused upon the ways in which Catholics have thrown off what he considers to be the unnecessarily restrictive moral law of the Church, and have constructed for themselves a framework for sexual behaviour which is based upon individual circumstances rather than on the universal absolutes of institutional Church law. Lodge would agree with Harmon Grisewood that Catholics can be trusted to construct their
own personal moral parameters through the "interaction of conscience and experience" (200) without necessarily succumbing to the dangers of sexual depravity.

A central focus of Lodge's fiction, like that of Mary Gordon's, is the way in which the Catholic legacy of neo-Augustinian sexual pessimism often leads to great suffering in the lives of ordinary Catholics. In Paradise News (1991), for example, Lodge's Catholic characters are unable to find fulfillment in their lives because they suffer from a residual guilt which is mainly sexual and which is the legacy of an (Irish Jansenist) Catholic upbringing. In Paradise News, and in his latest novel, Therapy, Lodge explores the idea that at the root of the sexual guilt from which his characters suffer is the linking of notions of legitimate sexual conduct with the virtues of chastity and purity and, conversely, of sexual sin with vice and depravity. Lodge explores the possibility, in these two novels, that the parameters of Catholic moral law might be elastic enough to include the notion that such virtues as generosity and compassion play an important part in the sexual impulse. In Piers Paul Read's view, however, to justify sexual sin because it is motivated by good intentions and extenuating circumstances is a concession to the secular philosophy of moral relativism. Lodge, however, shares Mary Gordon's view and the view of many liberal Catholics, that sexual morality reduced to a list of rules and prohibitions that deny the complexity of human motivation and the intrinsic goodness of human sexuality as a part of creation defeats the purpose for which it is intended, becoming a crippling burden rather than a means for achieving happiness and harmony.

The English novelist Alice Thomas Ellis also supports the liberal Catholic contention that Church dogma involves an over-simplification of the categories of good and evil. In her novel, The Clothes in the Wardrobe, she seems to suggest that Church moral law is inadequate when it comes to the complex motivation behind human behaviour. She provides a moral conundrum that seems to defy categorization by depicting a nominally Catholic woman of dubious reputation named Lili who saves a young woman from marriage to an unsuitable man by arranging to be found in flagrante delicto with him. At the end of the novel, the young woman that she has "saved" reflects: "it was a strange martyrdom. [Lili] had offered
not so much a sacrifice as a gift. What she had given was of value only to me, and she had
not harmed or impoverished herself beyond redemption. I have long ceased attempting to
follow the processes by which God works out his purpose, but I know he sent me Lili" (140).
Ellis's Catholic vision, like that of Gordon and Lodge, is reminiscent of Graham Greene's in its
skepticism regarding pat judgements of human behaviour. Interestingly, in this fictional
episode Ellis also toys with the "virgin/whore antithesis" which Thomas Woodman suggests
has "taken definitive form in Catholicism" (153). Lili's act of sexual sacrifice seems to place
her at both extremes at the same time, as both saint and whore.

Although there is little evidence in Lodge's fiction to suggest that he perceives the
burden of flesh to be unequally divided between the sexes in favour of men, Lodge addresses
the tendency of Catholicism to conceive of morality in terms of gender and role. In his first
published Catholic novel, The Picturegoers, for example, much of Clare Mallory's unhappiness
is the result of her tendency to view herself in terms of polarized notions of womanhood.
Brought up to emulate the virtues attributed to the Blessed Virgin, Clare is unable to
acknowledge or accept the sexual impulses within herself that she associates with Mary's
opposite, the whore. In How Far Can You Go? Lodge reveals the damaging effects of what
Catholic feminists see as the Catholic tendency to polarize women at the extreme ends of the
spectrum of purity, as either virgins or whores. Lodge's discontented husband, Dennis,
exhibits this tendency when he assumes that the young woman whom he desires must be
sexually promiscuous because she has already blotted her moral copybook by giving birth to
an illegitimate child.

Lodge seems also to suggest that behind traditional Catholic notions of sexual morality
lies the idea that renunciation and holiness go hand in hand. As the Catholic concept of
sexual morality involves a great deal of self-denial and renunciation, going without sex must
therefore be a good and holy thing. Lodge attempts to counter this stress upon renunciation
by emphasizing the importance of self-fulfillment in the lives of his characters. He gives voice
in his portrayals of Catholic characters to the liberal concept that neither happiness nor
spiritual wholeness is possible if the sexual component of the personality is repressed or
denied. Furthermore, Lodge emphasizes the healing power of human sexuality when it
becomes the physical expression of compassion or generosity. Lodge's recent fiction is
imbued with a sense of the joyous possibilities of life for his characters once they have
managed to abandon rigid rules of sexual morality and have adopted more flexible notions of
sexual ethics. Redemption for Lodge's characters comes with the realization that human
sexuality is sacramental in that it can heal the suffering that incarnation necessarily involves
and can alleviate the sense of loneliness and isolation which characterizes contemporary life.

Lodge's liberal Catholic vision is clearly based upon his confidence in the intrinsic
goodness of humanity and the belief that Catholics have at last come of age and can be relied
upon to make sensible and moral decisions for themselves. However, his depictions of the
often-misguided attempts of his group of progressive Catholic couples in How Far Can You
Go? to revamp their faith -- they proceed to get drunk together following an informal
celebration of the Eucharist in one of their homes, for example -- show that, like Mary Gordon,
Lodge retains a nostalgic fondness for the forms of worship of the pre-Conciliar Church. Like
the Southern American Catholic novelist, Walker Percy, Lodge is not altogether comfortable
with some of the ways in which liberal Catholics have attempted to "update" the practice of the
faith, although he seems to have more confidence than Percy in the Church's ability to adapt
without allowing "the traditional Catholic sense of the institutional Church...to fade too much"
(Woodman 94).

In her 1977 novel, The Sin Eater, the English Catholic novelist Alice Thomas Ellis
voices the frustration of those who fear that the Church has gone too far in its attempt to
accommodate the modern world. Her jaundiced and outspoken heroine, Rose, rather
irreverently articulates what she believes God's response to the window-opening of Vatican II
to be: "I bet he spends Sunday with the divine fingers bunged down the divine ears. I do
myself. . . . There is nothing to do on Sundays since the Pope went mad. . . . They've
abandoned Christ . . . and taken up with Jesus, soppy little Jesus Jones, meek and mild and
gassing away gormlessly in the vernacular" (180). Through Rose, Ellis articulates the concern of many Catholics that the efforts of the Church to adapt itself to the conditions of contemporary life may leach it of its distinct and unique character, empty its rites of their profound meaning, and destroy the beauty of Catholic forms of worship.

The fiction of the conservative Catholic novelist Piers Paul Read embodies his fear that the Church is in danger of being engulfed in the tide of moral relativism under which the moral structure of secular society is already submerged. Clearly, like many traditional Catholics, Read would like to see repealed some of the changes that the Second Vatican Council brought into being. Unlike liberal Catholics Mary Gordon and David Lodge, Read seems to be convinced that the efforts of Catholics to compromise between the absolute moral law of the Church and the moral relativism which secular society espouses will lead inevitably to moral decay within the Church. In his novel A Married Man, for example, in the character of Clare Strickland Read portrays the impossibility of living with one foot in the world, as it were, and one in the Church. Read's conservatism makes his a lone voice in the wilderness urging in his fiction a return to pre-conciliar obedience to the tenets of Church moral law. Read is not a sexual pessimist, however, espousing the notion that sexual pleasure is the result of original sin. He espouses the Thomist view of human sexuality that affirms the goodness of human sexuality as part of God's creative love. Read believes, however, that there is always a danger that in the hierarchy of human impulses, sexuality will attempt to fight its way to the top. Thus, while Read does not deny the intrinsic goodness of sexual pleasure, he seems to agree with Pope Paul VI that "humans are particularly weak in the realm of sexual discipline" (qtd. in Smith 328) and that their sexual behaviour requires, therefore, strict laws of control such as the Church provides. Although it is unwise to assume the Jesuit priest who counsels the adulterous wife, Clare Strickland, in A Married Man, speaks with Read's voice at all times, when he tells Clare that "it is not for nothing that the Church has been so wary of sexual desire" (246) he articulates the belief that Read shares with many conservatives within the Church, that "if misused and perverted [the sexual urge] can wreak great evil and cause much
misery" (246). According to Father Michael's lexicon, the terms "misused and perverted" refer to all indulgence in sexual activity that violates the moral law of the Church.

While Read may intend Father Michael's rigidly dogmatic approach to indicate the shortcomings of the clergy in their efforts to address the needs of contemporary Catholics, he appears to agree with Father Michael's sentiments when he tells Clare that the "purely physical instincts" must be strictly controlled if one is to grow into a "spiritual being" (247). Furthermore, while Read consciously affirms the goodness of the flesh, in Father Michael's words, Read seems to justify unconsciously the split between flesh and spirit which liberal Catholics contend has led to the devaluation of the physical aspects of incarnation in Catholic Christianity. Read has frequently been criticized for what his detractors see as his tendency to use his fiction as a soap box for the orthodox Catholic point of view, and this criticism has some validity. Read's characters seem on occasion to be highjacked by his apologetic intent.

Read is acutely aware that within the Church, liberal notions of sexual morality are fast gaining ground and that, as a representative of the shrinking band of traditionalists who has the attention of the reading public, he is perhaps morally responsible "to attempt," as Thomas Woodman puts it, "to counter the secular demystification and trivialization of sex" (149). Although Read's novels are much more than mere "religious tracts," they represent refutations in fiction of liberal Catholic views of sexual morality which Read believes are tainted with moral relativism. Read's Catholic conservatism directs his focus to the ascetic aspects of incarnation, those that stress the need to mortify the body in the interests of spiritual health. For Read, the importance of incarnation lies in the notion that followers of Christ are called to deny the flesh and to suffer in it, as Christ himself suffered, and in this way, rather than in sexual liberation, to integrate the body with the spirit in preparation for eventual union with God.

The American Catholic novelist Anne Redmon avoids the contentious issues with which Catholics are currently preoccupied. She is representative of the many Catholic women who attempt to re-image, or re-incarnate, traditional images of femininity rather than discarding
them. The question of free will and fate is a "fundamental concern" in Redmon's novels, a concern which focuses upon the ways in which her characters interpret and often misinterpret the nature and meaning of incarnation. While she distances herself from feminist ideology, Redmon attempts to show that intuitive modes of understanding and interpreting experience are valuable means of achieving a spirituality that includes, while it transcends, the physical. There is a recurring pattern in Redmon's fiction in which those of her characters who possess moral courage emerge from a self-imposed isolation that is a construct of the erroneous idea that purity is achieved by the avoidance of intimacy. They learn, chiefly through their powers of intuition, that prudery is a cowardly substitute for purity, and that incarnation involves sharing the passionate involvement of Christ in the lives of others.

From her unique viewpoint, Redmon explores notions of feminine purity which are implicit in the traditional image of the Virgin Mary. Rather than dismissing traditional images of Mary as hopelessly sexist, Redmon argues that "there are many ways in which Christian iconography, both verbal and artistic, can help the present feminine predicament," and she has revealed that she is particularly drawn to Russian icons of Mary which emphasize her role as "Life-giving Source" and "Indicator of the Way" ("Interview" 338). Such images stress Mary's dynamic role in salvation rather than her passivity, and it is this view of the feminine ideal that Redmon foregrounds in her fiction. In Redmon's view, Christ's incarnation requires the Christian to become involved in human community and to share in "His wounded, personal, passionate love" (233), just as Mary's "be it unto me" signals her willingness to become radically involved in God's plan for the salvation of the world.

Redmon sidesteps the current Catholic controversy concerning sexual morality by focusing upon physical desire as a component of the highest kind of love, which she calls "spiritual love," rather than upon its genital expression. In fact, although they are frequently capable of strong sexual feeling, few of her female characters consummate these feelings. In Music and Silence, for example, Redmon's virgin/martyr, Beatrice, is murdered just as her budding relationship with her colleague, Ben, is beginning. Irene, too, in Redmon's third novel,
Second Sight, does not enter into a sexual relationship with the man she loves, at least during the period with which the book is concerned, although the reader is given the impression that their relationship will lead eventually to marriage and sexual consummation. As the novel ends, and Irene runs down the street to meet John, the reader is reminded of Redmon's admission that she is fascinated by the idea of purity, whether "moral, natural, or artistic" and that she is very enthralled by Keats' poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and with the "beauty of those frozen in an eternal, un consummated pursuit" ("Interview" 335). Like this image, Redmon's attitude toward sexual desire and its expression is "paradoxical, resonant, and equivocal" (335).

While she is fascinated by purity, however, Redmon is careful to distinguish in her fiction between true purity and the sexlessness which Woodman points out is often mistaken for chastity (154). Although she is reluctant to be identified with feminism, Redmon's fiction reveals an ongoing concern with the images which inform Catholic notions of feminine sexuality, especially those that tend to become distorted by those who, who like Beatrice and Irene, use them as a refuge from human community and the risks of becoming involved in the lives of others. For Redmon, sexual desire is always present in human love, whether that love is directed toward a member of the same or the opposite gender. Redmon embodies in her fiction her belief that human sexual passion can fuel the individual's attempt to emulate Christ's passionate love for humankind, and that it prompts the individual to risk the pain and suffering which human relationships inevitably involve. Furthermore, since it is a reflection of Christ's passionate nature, sexual desire is both a sanctified and sacramental aspect of incarnation.

Each of the contemporary novelists whose work has been the focus of this study reflects upon and responds to issues of great concern to Catholics, particularly women, as the Church struggles to respond to the great changes which have taken place with such rapidity in the second half of this century. The machinery of the Church, however, grinds exceedingly slow -- a fact that cheers traditionalists such as Piers Paul Read and discourages such liberals
as David Lodge and Mary Gordon. For feminists such as Gordon, greater recognition of women's needs and aspirations by the institutional Church is a matter of urgency. Redmon, however, seems content to represent in her work the Catholic women who place themselves above the fray and focus their energies on determining ways in which women can interpret existing theological paradigms so that they reflect women's ways of interpreting God's will for them. Redmon's mode of approach is one of reinterpretation rather than rebellion, and in this she represents a large if largely silent body of women within the Church.

Although most feminists both in the Church and in the secular world would argue that there is still a great deal left to be achieved, in recent decades secular society has endeavoured to construct new paradigms for the interpretation of women's place in society which allow women greater control over their own lives and a greater share of the power to shape society. Within the Catholic Church, however such liberating paradigms are slow in arriving, and in terms of power and influence, Catholic women lag far behind their secular sisters. However, not all commentators are pessimistic about the ability of the Church to adapt to the realities of the late twentieth century, at least in the United States. In commenting on the future of Catholicism in the United States, Paul Giles writes:

Because of [its] universalist heritage and the propensity of American Catholicism to adapt itself to many different types of environment, there is not necessarily an irredeemable fissure between unfamiliar ethnic or feminist perspectives and the 'canonical' imperatives of established tradition. Potential contradictions can be sutured and reconciled within the expansive framework of the institution's dominant ideology. (512)

As an example, Giles refers to the work of Louise Erdrich, one of the "new" Catholic novelists whose work is informed both by her Catholic heritage and by the symbols and mysteries of her Chippewa Indian background. I believe that Paul Giles' argument for the adaptability of the American Church in the face of social change holds true also for the Church in England, although for different reasons.

Because of their minority status and the climate of distrust which has traditionally surrounded English Catholicism, their historic need to blend in with their Protestant neighbours
while remaining true to their own distinct and hard-won heritage has encouraged English Catholics to find a compromise between Catholic moral law and current secular values. As Kate Saunders and Peter Stanford have observed, "at grass roots level -- a long way from the Vatican -- pragmatism appears to be winning the day" and "possibly, this generation will be the first to feel free to make its own sexual choices and stay within the Church" (58). It seems likely, in the light of these factors that the struggle of the Church to adapt will continue, slowly and painfully, into the next century, although inevitably thousands of Catholics, both liberal and conservative, will give up the struggle and leave the Church in despair. The relationship between many contemporary liberal Catholics and the institutional Church is bittersweet, and both the exasperation and the affection which such Catholics feel toward the Church are well documented in the fiction of the four novelists with which this study is concerned.

As the gap widens between Catholic practice and institutional Church law, especially in matters of sexual behaviour, liberals such as Gordon and Lodge would argue that change must come if the Church is to present itself to the world as a viable alternative to worldly values rather than as an interesting ideological anachronism. Furthermore, in view of the widespread dissent within the Church, particularly from women, it is difficult to envision the survival of the institutional Church if it continues its ban on artificial birth control and resists the claims of women to an actual as well theoretical equality with male Catholics. Women constitute half the laity, after all, and an even greater proportion among Catholics who attend Church regularly.

The future of the Catholic novel as a distinctive sub-genre, however, seems less certain. Since the era of universal dogmatic certainty has passed, the Catholic novel may well, as Piers Paul Read fears, be subsumed into the larger category of the Christian novel. However, it seems likely that Catholic novelists, whether or not they are able to sustain the notion of the Catholic novel as a discrete and distinctive genre, will continue to play an important role in bringing the numinous to bear upon the secular preoccupations of contemporary society. Contemporary Catholic novelists reflect in their work an increasing
willingness to "love the questions" posed by life in the contemporary world, rather than offering
definitive answers. Because of this, and because the contemporary Catholic novel provides
an experientially based context for moral reflection on sexual behaviour parallel to and often in
tension with the traditional teaching of the Church, it may be that the Catholic novel will find a
wider readership and thus provide an important arena for dialogue both among Catholics and
between the Church and secular society. The American novelist Walker Percy has claimed
that "the novel form...is necessarily an art of incarnation" (qtd. in Giles 370). If this is true, the
Catholic novel clearly has a part to play not only in exploring the issues which concern
Catholics in a fast changing society, but can also take part in the creative act of re-imagining
Church in accordance with the needs and aspirations of the faithful. Furthermore, because
Catholic women have frequently claimed that their voice goes unheard when decisions that
concern them are made by the all-male magisterium of the Church, it seems likely that the
Catholic novel will provide an increasingly popular venue for discussion of women's needs,
desires, and moral thinking, and for the remaking of women's roles within the Church.
Bibliography

Primary Texts


Secondary Texts


Morey, Ann-Janine. "Beyond Updike: Incarnated Love in the Novels of Mary Gordon."


