Project MUSE®

Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

An image of the Virgin and Christ Child, from the Reydon Hours, c. 1320–24, Cambridge University Library, Dd IV 17, fol. 11v.

Project MUSE®

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Mary

by Miri Rubin[*]

In October 1994 the Israeli chanteuse Ahinoam Nini performed at a Concert marking the Vatican's *Year of The Family*. She sang verses in English and Latin: *Ave Maria*. The *Osservatore Romano* heralded her performance as a unique occasion, a Jewish woman singing to a pope. Interviews with the gracious Nini reported her feeling on the occasion: the invitation was an honour, a gesture of peace, from a pope who had begged forgiveness for Catholic excesses against Jews throughout the centuries. Nini attracted hostile reaction from some orthodox Jews, but these were countered by a shower of approval from more liberal folk. The world delighted – even the most world-weary music journalists – in hearing a young Jewish woman sing some of the words, which millions still believe to be the words of an angel uttered long ago to another young Jewish woman endowed with song, Mary – Mother of Jesus.

Mary and song, Mary and forgiveness, Mary and peace. Mary is a truly global figure. Her image has the power to disarm, and to merge. She was the secret weapon of missionaries, but also became the favourite of those whom they aimed to Christianize: in Mexico indigenous imagination responded by creating the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, in what had once been the chapel of the mother goddess Toci. The mission to Huron women led with the cult of Mary, female saints and nuns. In Japan the goddess of mercy *Kannon Bosatsu* merged with Mary, so that when Christians were persecuted in the early seventeenth century they worshipped Mary Kannon with a cross under her dress. Mary's images accompanied merchants and friars to the Canaries and Mexico, to Peru and the Congo. And so she became a global image, made and remade out of the dreams of her beholders and the suggestions of her purveyors. She was often the first image put forward as conquest ceded a space to mission, an image of love and inclusion after the trauma of conquest.

This power to console continues to animate sensibility and creativity even away from Christian orthodoxy or Creed. A communist artist like the German Käthe Kollwitz chose Mary to represent suffering motherhood and the memory of the son she had lost in the First World War. Mary travels

*This paper was given as an inaugural lecture at Queen Mary, University of London (30 October 2003); it was accompanied by music and a display of images. The ideas in it form the core of a book which will be published in 2006 by Penguin (UK) and Yale University Press (US).

 © History Workshop Journal 2004

swiftly across boundaries: she is favoured by feminists as a welcome female presence within religions which privilege men, is appreciated by those who harbour ecumenical aspirations, is used as a universal symbol of maternal nurture and human sympathy. When Raphael's painting *The Madonna of the Pinks* was recently offered to young mothers at workshops in the National Gallery, their responses showed just how easily her image elicits interest and joy, even from those who know little about Christianity or European art.

Mary's power to console has also been historically linked to violence, which creates the very need for consolation and exculpation. Mary's grace is felt most strongly in the aftermath of struggles, by thinkers and writers, preachers and teachers and leaders, who seek to make abundantly clear the triumph of Christianity through a God made Flesh. Her global eruption is the product of concerted and knowing work, which turned a figure so nebulous and mysterious – to whom few biblical phrases refer – into one around whom whole life-worlds have been woven, and in whose name peoples and cultures have been displaced and re-made.

How might a historian meet the challenge of understanding Mary? This historian does so supported by the scholarship and the friendship of many who still live in the land imagined as Mary's home. Thinking about Mary takes me back to the troubled terrain where I gained my own knowledge of the world and of the historian's craft. In Jerusalem I encountered the vying desires of Christianity, Judaism and Islam; I learned to work historically with the texts and images, with the coveted sites and landscapes, which I studied with Ora Limor, Ronnie Ellenblum, Israel Yuval and Oded Irshai, from teachers such as Joshua Prawer, David Jacoby, Benjamin Kedar, Shula Shahar, Elisheva Revel, and Michael Heyd. Their unique blend of respectful exploration of the religious cultures that underpin identities so painfully now in bloody conflict, is the only type of understanding, which will one day make Jerusalem a place where all children can walk 'hand in hand'. In Britain, I enjoyed a privileged entry into medieval religious cultures from Professor Christopher Brooke, who supervised my doctorate at Cambridge. I am also spurred by the encouragement and example of my friends here at Queen Mary, where a community of scholarship and empathy has evolved in our Arts Faculty, producing Humanities with a difference, where deep learning is applied with torque and grit. None of my work would be as pleasurable or effective without my many friends and colleagues – several here today – from all over the world.

Understanding the historical emergence of Mary means an immersion in the materials and concerns of peoples in the centuries which saw what Daniel Boyarin has called 'the co-emergence' of Judaism, Christianity and pagan religions. For Mary was not born, but made; every aspect of the beliefs associated with her is open to historical scrutiny, back to a time before she was deemed a perpetual virgin, or an intercessor, or immaculately born. Among the first communities of Christians in Palestine, more

properly called Jewish-Christians, an understanding of Jesus as a moral leader centred on his teachings and example. Jesus exemplified in his ministry principles and practices characteristic of contemporary Jewish sects, and Jewish-Christian followers became part of the Judaean, and then Gallilean, social landscape in the first century. By the second half of that century a different version was emerging, in the pagan cities of Ephesus and Corinth and Philippi, one which taught extreme renunciation, and which struggled hard against the Jewish heritage which still attracted so many pagan converts in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean. Peter Brown has described this world as ‘rustling with the presence of many divine beings’. The good news of Christianity – of a God made Man, about mastery of the body – was set against the Jewish deity nebulous and all-powerful, and the pagan – like Aphrodite and Eros – who played cruel games with people’s emotions and desires.

As Salman Rushdie so brilliantly intuited about the birth of Islam, and as we have learned from Natalie Zemon Davis, the work of persuasion and of polemic is narrative work. From the early second century stories survive which were told with the aim of bolstering the belief in a God made Man, a God made human in almost every embarrassing and familiar way. Averil Cameron has called this ‘filling in the gaps in the Gospel stories, working out their logical implications’. And so the second-century *Protogospel of James* tells about an incarnate God’s life as a boy: with school friends and teachers and play-dates. It also gave his mother a childhood: she was precocious – she walked at six months – and incredibly pure.

The cultural work of exploring Jesus’s humanity to the limits of its infantile pleasures and transgressions also achieved other insights. For the stories about the childhood of a God made Flesh, domesticated beliefs which were already, and increasingly, straining relations between Jewish-Christians and emergent Gentile-Christian communities. Some apocrypha, like the Life of Joseph the Carpenter, known from a tenth-century Coptic manuscript, but containing second-century stories from Nazareth, presented Joseph as a respectable Jewish patriarch, who could be assimilated into a Jewish-Christian picture of the world. But the apocryphal gospels, about Jesus as son and Mary as mother, despised Jews and rejected them. A good example from the *Protogospel of James* tells of Jesus trying to play with the children of a neighbouring Jewish family; the parents hide their kids in an oven while they open the door to Jesus and pretend the children are away. When they return to the oven – they find pigs instead. Jesus is a wrathful little boy in these stories: moody, naughty, energetic, very bright.

An important cultural paradigm for the new religion of incarnation was set in these early texts: that Jesus’s humanity is best realized through stories about his childhood, set within the thrust and *agon* of debate and polemic. As these turned increasingly to the matter of the incarnation, Mary’s role grew into the focus of attention. While the Christian message was powerfully told by the narrative of the Passion, it required the vital guarantee of

matching tales of incarnation and Virgin Birth. For these made the new God unique, different from pagan gods, and from the God as conceived by the Jews, among whom he had been born. Polemical lines were drawn between those who saw in Christianity only contradiction, and those who adopted the very contradiction as proof.

These lines were fortified by the power of the state once Christianity became a recognized and then favoured religion of the Roman Empire. The Council of Nicaea of 325 incorporated Virgin birth and the dual nature of a God made Flesh in its creedal formula. The Armenian bishop of Edessa reported the Nicaean Creed to Christians in Persia soon after the council. He graphically conveyed the now public truth:

> That Christ was God of God and Man born of a woman, and that just as he dwelt in Mary's pure womb, so he created every foetus in every womb and inspired each with a little spirit.

This 'pure womb' became a challenge to the minds of Christians and non-Christians alike. How was it to be imagined? Further debate resulted a century later in a formulation forced through the Council of Ephesus of 431 under Emperor Theodosius II. There Mary was named *theotokos* – the Bearer of God – to the dismay of several bishops who had been waylaid en route, and were offended by the controversial decision. For debates were still rife about Christ's nature, and there were those, particularly thinkers in Syria and Palestine, who were troubled by some of the implications of the intermingling of humanity and divinity. But the political ground had been prepared for *theotokos* by the agency of the Emperor's sister, and on the morrow of the Council, Cyril Patriarch of Alexandria (d. 444) drafted a memorandum to his supporters in Constantinople with a list of sweeteners, gifts and outright bribes to ladies-in-waiting and eunuchs of the imperial court, in an attempt to prevent any backsliding on Mary as *theotokos*. Yet dissent did follow, from Nestor, Patriarch of Constantinople, who abhorred the emphasis on Christ's divinity which *theotokos* implied, and preferred *Christotokos*, bearer of Christ. But Nestor was excommunicated and banished. A triumphant counterblast thundered from the later Patriarch Proclus, in some of the most overwhelming homilies ever written in praise of Mary. He also suggested that the day after the Nativity – 26 December – should become a Marian feast, the first of many Marian feasts to follow.

Early images of the *Virgo lactans*, Mary suckling Christ, survive on papyri and wall paintings. They resemble greatly images of the Empress on fifth century coins, but also wall-paintings of Isis suckling Horus. Different regions produced differing emphases and styles of representation of Mary: the Goddess-mother was an Egyptian emphasis, whereas the involvement of Mary with the Holy Spirit was a Syriac one, which brought Mary close to the mysteries of the Trinity. Syriac writers contributed an all-important clue to the manner of Mary's impregnation: while the serpent had lured Eve

by words which entered her ear, Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit which, fittingly, entered hers.

An outpouring of stories for Christians – in Greek, Syriac, Latin, Armenian, Coptic – continued to fill in the gaps of the Gospel story. The cultural agents who told of Christ's infancy, also elaborated his mother's death, and probably based the stories, known to us from the fifth century, upon oral traditions attached to sites in the Holy Land. The polemical tone which emphasized Jewish agency in the infancy tales also inspired writings about Mary's end. New and old tales described her miserable life after Christ's death: she continued his ministry of healing, spent time with the Apostles, and she grieved. The Jews of Jerusalem harassed her and ran her out of town, so she moved to Bethlehem. Mary wished to die, and so she was granted a special death. These early texts, which Stephen Shoemaker has now studied so expertly, created by the year 500 traditions of Mary's death in which the Jews are prime enemies. One of the earliest accounts, a fourth-century text in Coptic, begins with praises of Mary, and adds:

> But perchance a senseless wicked Jew may hear me ascribing such great honours as these to this Holy Virgin, and be troubled by his wicked jealousy . . . and dare to speak with his mouth . . . saying, cease ascribing all these honours to this Virgin born of a man and a woman.

Mary's death and assumption were like a re-enactment of Christ's death and resurrection, and thus a performance of the central mystery of Christianity.

Mary was made in a world which knew Mother goddesses, but which had never contemplated a God Made Flesh. Around her a polemical terrain had formed, between Christians and other Christians, Christians and Jews, and later Christians and Muslims. By the fifth century a Jewish polemical and parodic version of the Gospels, *Toledoth Jeshu*, had evolved: according to this Jesus was a magician, his healings necromancy, his birth illegitimate, his mother an adulteress, his followers a band of 'evil disciples'. In the polemical tract *Qissat Mujadalat al-Qussuf*, a tenth-century Arabic translation of a sixth-century work in Syriac, Nestor, a priest who converted to Judaism explains his fateful choice:

> I do not believe in a God who dwelt in the filth and menstrual blood in the abdomen and womb . . . King Augustus sent emissaries to register all pregnant women. Mary was found to be pregnant at the inn at Bethlehem, and she was asked 'By whom are you pregnant?' and she said 'By Joseph'. So Mary testified that Joseph is her husband and that she is pregnant by him.

The debates of early Christianity established as a touchstone of Christian faith and belonging that Christ was born of a woman who was not only a

virgin at his conception, but remained intact after his birth for the rest of her life. The Nicene Creed prompted discussion about the terms of the religion allowed only recently to flourish throughout the Mediterranean and near eastern world; but by 451 the Council of Chalcedon envisaged it as the required and official faith of imperial subjects. As the seal of Christ's salvific power, as the agent of the incarnation, Mary was adopted as the Empire's patron, present in court ceremonial, and filling elaborate architectural spaces.

A vision of redemption and authority grew in the eastern Empire, a fusion of the divine and the human, portrayed in the blend of autocracy and accessibility of the Emperor's person. Mary was at its heart; companion of monks, protector of the *polis*. Following the defeat of the Avars outside the walls of Constantinople in 626, grateful prayers were instituted in the church of the Blachernai. The *akathistos* tradition was born: strings of laudatory invocations to Mary from wakeful, disciplined and erect bodies of monks:

> To you, our leader in battle and defender,
> O Theotokos, I, your city, delivered from sufferings,
> Ascribe hymns of victory and thanksgiving.
> Since you are invincible in power,
> Free me from all kinds of dangers,
> That I may cry to you:
> 'Hail, bride unwedded'.

The writers and pilgrims, the ambassadors, merchants and marriage retinues, that moved between East and West could only marvel at the heights of worship accorded to Mary, at the elaborate hymnody and the intellectual athleticism which was attached to her mission and her meaning in the East. Materials crafted in the eastern Mediterranean underwent elaboration and commentary by thinkers and translators – Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine – each within a context of polemic and debate. Ambrose found in Mary's virginity an alternative ideal for women, which could draw them away from the exacting demands of patriarchal patrician marriage. Jerome fortified the prophecies of Mary's virgin birth in the choices he made when translating the gospels into Latin. Augustine's Mary arose out of a polemic with dualists, those who abhorred the thought of her God-bearing body. He celebrated her marriage and procreation, as cornerstones of Christian societies. In the following centuries images and practices around Mary were mainly transmitted and considered by monks, in Italy and Gaul and Spain, in England and in Ireland. And as is ever the case the suggestive and rich ideas embedded in hymnody and creed merged with local taste and traditions into new forms of Latin and vernacular images of Mary, like the mother and son over a moon carved on the eighth-century crosses found at Monifieth in Angus, or the Adoration of the Magi at Sandbach in Cheshire.

Anglo-Saxon homilies as well as carved ivories and stones elaborated images of spinning and weaving in wool into metaphors of incarnation, linking apocrypha and native work into one.

Sin and the impossible striving for purity were the rhetorical frames offered by western monastic life; in these monasteries Mary's possibilities were explored in the later centuries of the first millennium. In search of purpose for lives spent away from family and hearth, monks tested the possibilities of their Christian heritage, which they were often called to transmit – through mission – to people who had never encountered it before. In ninth-century monasteries basic tenets of Christianity were debated: the Eucharist, the incarnation, and Mary. Rachel Fulton has delicately shown the link between the task of mission and theological work. Around 830, at Corbie, Paschasius Radbert, who had already opened up discussion of the Eucharist, did the same for Mary. The Canoness Hrotswitha's library at Gandersheim priory (in Lower Saxony) around 935 was sufficiently good to support her composition of a *Life of Mary*, from birth to the flight to Egypt, in racy dactylic metre. In the monasteries of Europe, based on Greek and Latin philosophy and letters, on the Fathers of the Church, and animated by the politics of conversion and expansion, medieval Christianities were born.

Not all monasteries were equally active in this work, for they varied in style and wealth, but the western appropriation of Mary was soon marked by the effects of monastic propulsion. The penitential theology of Anselm of Canterbury, which redefined the incarnation's purpose and necessity, used all the support that a Virgin as mother could offer to the idea of an incarnate God. Monastic reflection on sin and salvation also produced some of the most startling expressions of abjection in prayer. A prayer to Mary, often associated with Anselm, by Maurilius of Rouen (d. 1067), sets the tone:

> Sed quis ago, obscenitates meas referens auribus illibatis? Horresco, domina, horresco, et arguente me conscientia, male nudus coram te erubesco.

> But what am I doing, pouring my obscenities into your purest ears? I am horrified, lady, horrified, and my conscience argues against me, naked in front of you I blush terribly.

Penitence was a powerful route to Mary, but it was not the only one. Single-minded absorption in the possibilities of learning more about her was favoured by monk-scholars, and by priests in cathedrals. Around the year 1000 the great teacher of Chartres, Fulbert, developed a responsory, a liturgical chanted offering – *Stirps Jesse*, the root of Jesse – endowing Mary with full genealogical credentials. In the monastery of Deutz near Cologne around 1125 the monk Rupert, a renowned biblical scholar, expressed his

Marian desires through a different type of work. He composed the first-ever commentary on the *Song of Songs* in a Marian key: here the exegetical code was not the traditional pair of Christ and the Church, the commentary hinged on Mary. Helinand of Froidmont, a troubadour turned Cistercian monk (d. 1229), chose the botany of a rose as his interpretative key; the colour of the rose signifies three things in Mary: the redness of her shy blush, the fire of her charity, the zeal of her justice. By the late twelfth century it was possible to imagine Mary through the images of the Holy Land, enlivened by accounts of crusades and pilgrimages in Christ and Mary's homeland. The Danish narrator of the exploits of a group of Scandinavian crusaders c.1200 explains the meaning of the 'land of milk and honey':

> By 'milk' . . . Christ's human nature is represented, and the word 'honey' . . . signifies the inner sweetness of the Godhead. Therefore the Promised Land flows with milk and honey, in other words, the Virgin Mary brings forth God and Man.

Mary's purity attracted some of the most creative impulses of Christian cultures. It was invoked in theology, prayer and music; its impossibility was a fruitful terrain both for elaboration of traditions and for radical departure. The economy of purity was inflected by the emergent image of an Immaculate Mary, so pure that even her own conception had been without sin. Her intimacy with Christ required, according to some, this new unique order of purity. In the 1150s Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–67) elaborated this idea, one only occasionally glimpsed in earlier writings: Mary was born free of Original Sin. Among the opponents of the Immaculate Conception was the great poet of Mary's praise, Bernard of Clairvaux. He did not doubt that she had never sinned, but he could not accept that her generation in a natural way failed to transmit original sin, through the sexual act. He argued:

> The royal Virgin has in more than abundant measure titles to honour, true marks of dignity. What need, then, for false claims? Honour her for the integrity of her flesh, the holiness of her life . . . Proclaim her as reverenced by angels, desired by nations, foretold by patriarchs and prophets . . . preferred to all. Aught else should I scruple to admit . . .

According to Bernard, Mary received a special dose of grace at her conception, to erase the Original Sin, this in itself was a mark of her distinction, her sanctification.

Some of the greatest exponents of Marian virtue were engaged in a heated exploration of the incarnation and its promise. Such work required an engagement with the bible, and scholars created challenges for themselves by imagining conversations with Jews. Jews failed all Marian tests.

As Mary emerged increasingly pure, so her detractors emerged ever more perverse. The imagined relationship between Mary and the Jews underpinned a whole set of formative and central oppositions of Christian cultures: flesh and spirit, purity and pollution, love and hate, virtue and guilt. Such imagery was sometimes facilitated by the presence of Jews in European cities, interlocutors around whom polemic could be drawn. Such was the disputation of the Abbot of Westminster, Gilbert Crispin, with a Jew of London, and perhaps even of Odo of Tournai with a Jew named Leo, both around 1100. In Gilbert's disputation the Jew questioned the prophecy of a Virgin birth and Jesus's lineage. Odo argued in his work on the incarnation that Christ was without sin because he was born of a pure virginal body. In his disputation with Leo the Jew the polemical core is revealed: Mary's flesh is celebrated as a rejection of the Jew:

> Odo: . . . Gabriel said that she is 'full of grace'. Therefore her sex was filled with glory, her womb was filled with glory, her organs were filled with glory, the whole of her was filled with glory . . . Where is that which you call the uncleanliness of woman, the obscene prison, the fetid womb? Confess you wretch your stupidity . . .

Jews were thus placed close to those most powerful assertions of Marian sentiment within an incarnational aesthetic.

By the beginning of the second millennium monks and some nuns had become Mary's most perfect devotees and expositors. In the privacy of their cells, in the musical work of their choirs, in the abject creativity of prayer, they fashioned Mary as a mother who was also a life-long companion. Away from family, often directed towards the religious life at a very early age; they were motherless, full of longing, and so even abbots became mothers – as Carolyn Bynum has shown. Mary's lovers made careers of their Marian devotion, and were thus remembered: Fulbert, head of the school at Chartres Cathedral around 1000, was commemorated there as

> particularly devoted to blessed Mary, composed many treatises and many elegant stories about her . . . The blessed Virgin visited him when he was ill, and bathed his tongue . . . with an infusion of her own breast milk . . . three drops of this milk remained on his face and he collected these and placed them in a precious vase appropriate for them.

A miracle of milk. Monks and nuns created the quintessential mode of Marian worship – songs of praise and miracles – in repetitive excess.

Mary is song. Mary's liturgy spread in millennium Europe, through prayers and sequences, often rhymed, metrical chants. Reformers frequently criticized chant, as sensuous, distracting; the voices of young boys sounded disturbingly like those of women. But those who loved song saw it as an expression of infinite wisdom and harmony, like Mary herself.

First plainchant and later polyphony were introduced to the religious houses of Europe and to leading collegiate churches and cathedrals. Many monks and canons had their first taste of polyphony from a Marian office. Music can be memorized and so reproduced, and soon Marian hymns and sequences were introduced into the less opulent settings of parishes, urban and even rural.

Part of a cosmic plan, equal to the rhythm of the seasons and to the harmony of the movement of planets, music grew apace with the elaborated appreciations of Mary. Music and bodily awareness are everywhere in the work of the twelfth-century Rhenish nun Hildegard of Bingen; she celebrated the incarnation as a musical symphony played in Mary's womb in her hymn, *Ave generosa*:

Venter enim tuus gaudium habuit,	And your womb held joy when heaven's
Cum omnis celestis sumphonia te sonuit,	Harmonies rang from you,
Quia, virgo, Filium Dei portasti,	A maiden with child by God,
Ubi castitas tua in Deo claruit.	For in God your chastity blazed.

The hymn celebrates that most secret of places, the womb, full of music, ablaze with chastity, yet moist with saving dew. In the fourteenth-century allegorical poem by Heinrich von Muggeln, *Der Meide Kranz*, music claims to have lured God into Mary's womb:

Min don der sluk und bracht die luft	My tone struck and broke the air
Bis das ich in des herzen gruft	Until I lured God into the depths of the heart
. . . Und menscheit von der meide nam.	. . . And he took on humanity from the maid.

Christopher Page has identified a Marian musical moment frozen in time: a group of monks depicted chanting a Marian motet, in the early-fourteenth century English Howard Psalter c.1310–20. Motets, usually composed on secular themes – offered an occasion to consider the sweet pains of love and longing for Mary.

Alongside the music there were miracles, another monastic genre which spread widely. The most influential miracle collection was compiled by 1140 at Bury St Edmunds by an Italian monk, Anselm. If penitential prayer was good for disciplined souls, miracle stories were better for layfolk, for the young, for those who needed encouragement. They were particularly suited for use in sermons: to benefactors, to women seeking guidance and even, occasionally, to those rural parishes served by monks. Marian miracles were comfortingly predictable: transgression, realization through a shaming Marian miracle, repentance, and reception into Mary's embrace, in ways which Sarah Kay has greatly illuminated. In some of these stories the protagonist was a Jew, who realized his error through confrontation with Mary's goodness and power, and so converted to Christianity. These are

stories with a Happy End, and they fit into a vision of Jews as witnesses to Christian faith – *testimonium veritatis* – by their miserable state in the contemporary world, but also in their humble recognition of Christian triumph when they converted.

Chains of Marian miracle tales were soon translated and reworked in the vernaculars, by priests such as Adgar into Anglo-Norman in the late twelfth, or monks like Gautier of Coinci in the early thirteenth century, and then into Castilian and German. While the Latin versions were meant for use by monks and preachers, vernacular versions were aimed at aristocratic listeners or readers, or to be transmitted through sermons into popular literary forms, or into images. Occasionally the Marian tale appeals to rulers – kings and barons – exhorting them to act appropriately against the Jews of their domains. Jennifer Shea has demonstrated just how impatient were these self-appointed guardians of Mary with the message of forgiveness mandated by her tales.

As the late medieval centuries unfolded, these Marian miracles became increasingly nasty, and often ended with execution or expulsion of Jews. Other traditional materials were also re-written with added vigour and violent poignancy. A monk of St Peter's of Salzburg chose to rework the sequence *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* by inserting between stanzas VIII and IX, two new ones, with an emphasis upon Jewish cruelty:

Sie sach an der selben state:	She saw in that place
Die thron der trinitate	the throne of the Trinity
(das ist Christi *prust* und *herz)*	(Christ's breast and heart)
ein jud mit ainem scharfen spere	A Jew with a sharp spear
swind durchstach; awe der sere	swiftly pierced; Oh what pain
unde des pittern grossen smerz	great and bitter suffering.

The Marian moment of forgiveness and incorporation is here too undermined by the unyielding apportioning of guilt for cruel deeds.

This move from Marian inclusion to Marian violence was identified by Chaucer in his ever-disturbing *Prioress's Tale*. There his genteel and vain narrator tells the story of a Christian boy who passed through a Jewish quarter singing sweetly a song to the Virgin, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, which he had picked up at school. The sheer beauty of the boy's song caused his death, for the Jew who heard it could just not bear it. Incited by Satan the Jew slit the boy's throat and threw him into a privy. But the music continued to rise from the severed throat, through a Marian miracle of protection and harmony. Chaucer understood only too well, that Marian piety – repetitive, unquestioning – like that of the boy, was a harbinger of violence.

Conceived as the bearer of divine life, Mary increasingly came to fill the spaces devoted to Jesus's death. Here too Jews and Mary met, on perilous

terrain. Umbrian fraternities devoted to the crucifixion recited vernacular chants that elaborated every stage and physical aspect of the Passion. Dramatic verse composed by friars supported these vernacular recitations: the genre powerfully emphasizes Jewish guilt, by linking it to Mary's suffering. Some of these chants situated the devout in the position of the mother looking on, beholding the blood and sweat trickling down the tortured face. The confraternity devoted to chanting the *laude* to the Virgin in fourteenth-century Modena recited lines such as:

Ecrida ad alte voxe: o povel cudeo	And she cried in a loud voice: miserable Jew
Perchè me turmentavu' lo dolce filo meo?	Why have you tormented my sweet son?
To perdera per lue la segnoria e 'l pheo	You will lose power and rule by him,
ha l'angello m'a dicto ch'el e fiolo de deo.	He, whom the angel had told me was the son of God.

In Urbino the Marian confraternity viewed the drama of the Passion unfold in stages:

Per la carne pollita	Down the white flesh
currea sangue vermillo	the red blood trickled
or ecco amara vita	Behold this bitter life
k'aveva del maria fillo.	that Mary's son has had.
La gente desmentita	The crazed crowd
ordenaro consillo:	assembled in counsel:
la morte e lo desillo	death and destruction
de lo bono pastore.	to the good pastor.

Christ's Passion was fast becoming a drama enacted between Jews and the Virgin, over her son's body.

European religious culture was marked by this forceful entry of Mary into all realms of affect and practice. In *Paradiso* Dante struggled to move beyond Mary's beauty revealed in *Canto* 32, and to contemplate the vision of God in *Canto* 33. Yet this Marianization was not to everyone's taste. The Immaculate Conception divided leading European thinkers, and caused brawls in city streets. The problem with Mary is captured in the view attributed to a scholar of the University of Paris, who was tried in 1402 for scepticism towards the Immaculate Conception:

> En voles-vous faire une deesse? . . . luy attribuer cette loenge estoit la faire deesse.
>
> Do you want to make her into a goddess? . . . attributing to her such praise is tantamount to doing so.

Women were active in the appreciation of Mary's meanings. We have already heard the twelfth-century hymn of Hildegard; the image of the

pietà was created for the devotions of beguines in the southern Low Countries. Birgitta of Sweden and Margery Kempe of King's Lynn viscerally identified with the experience of Mary's birth. Women created Mary in their handiwork, and in their visions. Julian of Norwich saw that in Mary love and pain were utterly linked: 'the grettnes of her loue was cause of the grettnes of her peyne'.

But while we rightly think about the affinities of women and Mary, it was men who shaped her. They did so with the skills and authority that were their privilege. Men remade Mary in university work, in liturgical innovation, in their civic agendas for renewal and reform, in the ambitions of prestigious confraternities.

Remaking Mary often involved the organization of knowledge, which enabled display of skill, and was tantamount to homosocial play. Mary was associated with knowledge of nature, after all, the maker of all had dwelt in her; she intuited the orbits of planets and the delicate structure of plants. The bestiary and the lapidary, cycles of myths and ancient poetry – Christian spoils from antiquity – were moralized afresh in a Marian key. A fourteenth-century Dominican composed a Marian bestiary, the *Rosarius.* Here is his entry on the panther:

Panthere est beste atrempee	The panther is a temperate beast
De diverses couleurs coulouree:	Adorned with many markings
. . . Mout est le panthere courtois	. . . The panther is very courteous
Et ne fait enfans c'une fois	And bears offspring only once.

He then reveals:

La panthere se est Marie	The panther is Mary
Qui d'atrempance fu garnie	Full of moderation
. . . De couleurs la diversite	the variety of colours
Sont les vertus pluralite . . .	is her plurality of virtues.

The *Meide Kranz* describes twelve liberal arts competing for a place in Mary's crown. She bore not only Jesus, but a vision of nature, replete with wisdom:

Durch dines herzen klamme drank	through the narrow passage of your heart
Naturen art in rechter sass.	nature emerged in the proper way.

In a manner which Melanie Klein has taught us to appreciate, these intellectual projects manifest the journey towards knowledge as a journey of exploration with the mother, of her body and its secrets, seeking her approving embrace.

Men of learning and power sought and created Marian spaces for self-exculpation, even escape. Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster,

composed, around 1354, a devotional text in French *The Book of Holy Medicines*. This man of the world was a sick thing, wounded in ears and eyes, nose, mouth and hands and heart, through the sins that come so easily to a man of his station. He seeks cure through Christ's bleeding body and ministered by Mary, each of her joys to match one of his wounds. Another soldier and diplomat, Philippe de Mezières (d. 1405), combined his passion for Mary with a political drive against the Turks, through mobilization of Europe's chivalry. While on a diplomatic mission for the King of Cyprus in 1372 he presented Pope Gregory XI in Avignon with a petition for the creation of a Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, with ready-made office and dramatic piece for the day. Yet for all their attempts men also protested the impossibility of ever getting Mary quite right, as Dante did in Paradise *Canto 31*:

E s'io avessi in dir tanta divizia	And even if my speech were rich as my
Quanta ad immaginar, non ardirei	imagination is, I should not try,
Lo minimo tentar di sua delizia.	To tell the very least of her delights.

Mary's inspiration and solace were appreciated by the men who mounted programmes for collective renewal, by those who wielded the power to determine in the many dilemmas which faced European institutions in the centuries between Dante and Luther: Who was the real pope? How was Turkish threat to be countered? How might east and west be reunited? What is to be done with religious enthusiasts? How did Jews fit into European communities? What shape should the Christian family take? How was the bible to be read? In what language, by whom?

These questions were discussed in council chambers, in parliamentary assemblies – local and national – in universities, at church councils, in schoolrooms; they animated the work of poets, like Dante and Chaucer and Christine de Pisan. Mary appears along the trails of power of these debates: endorsing reform, sanctioning the violence of inquisition and expulsion, inspiring insight into social and political arrangements. In the early fifteenth-century Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, sought ideas for a Christian order in Mary's life. He promoted Joseph, hitherto often a figure of fun, an old Jew caught up in a Christian drama. His understanding of marriage and order came to hinge upon Mary and Joseph's gendered division of power and function. Gerson thought of their marriage as pure and companionate: how fitting for Mary to have a mate with whom to share her own great secret. And Joseph was a good father to Jesus: he taught him to walk, marvelled at his progress. In an ordered Christian universe units of family life respected the natural order of gender, of paternal authority and maternal nurture, within an extended family of step-siblings and step-parents. This theme of the faithful household was later developed by Martin Luther: in it dwelt Mary not as queen of heaven, not resplendent bride or queen, but as a simple *hausfrau* of great resilience, of perfect faith and obedience.

Heads of households, men of affairs, burghers, princes and gentry invested prodigiously in the cultural production which Mary made possible. The Van Gleijmes family of Bergen turned a family chapel of Our Lady in the church of St Gertrude into a powerhouse of incessant musical creativity around Mary from the 1470s, with extensive polyphony, daily intercessions, a choir and a stream of original compositions. In Bruges's fraternity of the Dry Tree (*Den Droghene Boome*, symbol of the Immaculate Conception) merchants, craftsmen and aristocrats paid a hefty membership fee for the support of a choir and original music throughout the century. From the 1470s the Sforza of Milan attracted Europe's finest musicians and composers to a court where the Milanese Ambrosian tradition yielded new fruit in a variety of Marian motet cycles. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, summoned an Order of Chivalry, the Order of the Golden Fleece, with the aim of reviving crusades. They celebrated a Marian office, approved by the University of Louvain in 1454. The Golden Fleece was the fleece of Gideon, which marked him for victory, as God's favoured warrior. It was also the symbol of Mary: the dew which moistened it figures the Holy Spirit descending on Mary. Less exalted folk also joined in civic groups for Mary, in an effort to make better lives through Marian rituals, in fraternities dedicated to the rosary in Germany and later in Italy, to Mary's Sorrows in the Low Countries, or to the Immaculate Conception in Spain.

Around the mother of God unparalleled fantasies of purity were woven, such that no woman could ever match, and to which humans could only strive. The clergy in the ordeals of its celibacy imitated Mary as they made Christ's body at the altar, and nurtured an affinity to God's mother as love object, special spouse. Their alleluias resounded with the praise of her purity and petitions for her love. The men who led the making of Mary – theologians, polemicists, mystical writers, commissioners of great works for monasteries and cathedrals – had left their own mothers at a tender age. They had left the home, the local idiom, sisters and carers, to join the world of Latin pedagogy, a world of discipline and pain, among boys and men. Might not the yearning for Mary, often cast as a yearning for a female loved one, echo these yearnings, this nostalgia, for the sounds of childhood, the warmth of kindred bodies, for the incomparable acceptance of the maternal embrace? Here may be the answer to Julia Kristeva's question 'what is there, in the portrayal of the maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, virginal, one, that ratifies a male being?'

For some of these men lives of action and creativity provided hurdles for maturation, and life-cycle alternatives to family and home in the world. But many did not, and so could never grow up. Remaining the child of the mother lost, the mother sometimes glimpsed in Mary of image and prayer, they struggled, always returning to the imagined tenderness of Mary and Christ's embraces.

It was this Marianization, the feminization of the culture – with Mary's

stories, her new feasts, the profusion of images, the repetitive devotions – that so appalled many Catholic and all Protestant reformers. Among the meanings of Luther's *Sola Scriptura* we may now place the banishment of apocryphal writings which told Mary's story. In sixteenth-century Europe Marian language shrank in some regions, and was reformed in others. Yet it was that late medieval Mary, rejected by Erasmus and Luther alike, that was about to break loose upon the world: she led the crusade against the Turks, and headed the introduction of Christianity to the Americas and Africa. There she accumulated a multitude of colonial predicaments, and there she remains, where her most lively devotees still live. Even for those of us who have never seen, or no longer see the world through Mary, reflection on her power to inspire and confuse and amaze and stifle, is an important and useful part of our reflection on what the maternal, and the historical, may mean to each of us today.