

## EDUCATING VIRGINS: ANNA JAMESON'S *LEGENDS OF THE MADONNA*

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Anna Jameson's *Legends of the Madonna* (1852) opens with a frontispiece etching depicting the education of the Virgin. It is a copy of Pinturicchio's work, "The Virgin Mary Studying the Scriptures in the Temple," in which Mary reads at a desk encircled by a group of Muse-like angels. Several closed volumes surround her (fig.1). The absence in the picture of Mary's mother St Anne may be because, as Jameson contends:

It is not said anywhere that St Anna instructed her daughter. It has even been regarded as unorthodox to suppose that the Virgin, enriched from her birth, and before her birth, with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, required instruction from any one. Nevertheless, the subject of the "Education of the Virgin" has been often represented in later times. (*Legends* 151)

In spite of this claim the Virgin's solitary scholarship is remarkable within the nineteenth-century context.

In the Victorian period it was commonly held that mothers, or suitable mother-substitutes, should be responsible for educating their daughters in order to prepare the next generation of women for motherhood (see for instance Ellis 270-71). However, given the list of accomplishments expected in young ladies, mothers were rarely suitably qualified for the task. Hence governesses were employed and colleges demanded. As the century progressed higher education for girls became a contentious issue owing to the belief that it could result in women's rejection of traditional roles. Female education was both defended and denounced on reproductive grounds. On the one hand most Victorians saw merit in the concept of educated mothers and thus advocated female education in the form of feminine accomplishments. On the other hand, according to Victorian critics of comprehensive female education, excessive book-learning by young women was thought to damage irreparably their reproductive organs and thus to endanger the British race by rendering male offspring physically puny and mentally deficient (David 19-20).

By contrast concerns with biological offspring do not limit Jameson's view of education. In 1840 she first alluded to an opinion concerning maternity which she later reiterated in the form of a "creed." This "creed" contains "a brief and definite statement of certain principles regarding the social and relative position of women" (referred to here as her "creed" because it contains six distinct points) where she makes the point that "the ordering of domestic life is our [women's] sacred province, indissolubly linked with the privileges, pleasures and duties of maternity. . . . And by maternity I do not mean the actual state of motherhood, which is not necessary nor universal, but the maternal organisation common to all women" (*Letters* 334). Nor is her stance on

education a dogmatic one. In the introduction to *Characteristics of Women* (1832) she claims that "I do not choose presumptuously to fling [my] opinions in the face of the world, in the form of essays on morality and treatises on education. I have rather chosen to illustrate certain positions by examples and leave my readers to deduce the moral themselves, and draw their own inferences" (5). Non-biological maternity, scholarship, and creativity as represented in *Legends of the Madonna* are associated with and embodied by the Virgin. In her treatment of Mary's pre-maternal life Jameson further stresses the improved creativity and independence of women as a direct result of education.



Fig.1 "The Virgin Mary Studying the Scriptures in the Temple"

My discussion will focus on the image of the Virgin as an "example" of Jameson's "certain position" on the education of girls, as a parallel to the education of her young niece Gerardine MacPherson, and as a metaphor for women's writing. The most concerted effort made by Jameson in the practical application of her maternal and educational theories was in the unofficial adoption of Gerardine. This social experiment coincided with the composition of *Legends of the Madonna*; as part of Gerardine's education Jameson took her to Italy in 1846 to assist with illustrations. Their relationship was rather unusual in that Jameson considered Gerardine more a daughter than a niece. A letter dated September 1846 announces the terms of Jameson's commitment to Gerardine: "I have now undertaken to be a mother to Gerardine. My mother, my two sisters and Gerardine are now supported by me only . . . the advantages

[of being abroad] to Gerardine in Masters and means of improvement of every kind are very great" (qtd Erskine 158). Gerardine was not motherless, but from the time of her father's bankruptcy she was considered "a daughter-companion" by Jameson (Thomas 148). Gerardine's sudden betrothal to Robert MacPherson in Rome distressed Jameson, as the engagement confounded her plans for her niece's future. As one of Jameson's biographers puts it: "Anna's grief and disappointment were intense [as] she had adopted this girl and hoped to have her always with her" (Erskine 236). While no formal "adoption" took place, the time spent with Gerardine was probably the nearest the childless Jameson had come to mothering a child who was biologically related. During their time in Florence Jameson was researching and writing her *Sacred and Legendary Art* series and instructing Gerardine in the arts of woodcutting and engraving. A significant number of the illustrations in *Legends of the Madonna* bear Gerardine's signature, among them the frontispiece etching that opens the work.

Both the frontispiece etching of the solitary, studious Virgin and the introductory text imply that female independence and education will be championed in *Legends of the Madonna*. The first chapters contain several statements reinforcing the independence of the pre-maternal Virgin. Here Jameson describes the Madonna as "an impersonation in the feminine character of beneficence, purity and power, standing between an offended Deity and . . . suffering humanity"(xvii). She also notes that "the type of person . . . assigned to the Virgin [in ancient writings] is more energetic for a woman than that which has been assigned to our Saviour as a man. . . . [Her] intellect, power and fortitude [combined in] . . . one glorious type of perfection" (xli). In these pages Jameson is concerned with portraits of the Madonna standing alone; she constantly refers to her as "THE WOMAN" and illuminates the Virgin's strength of character and intellect. Throughout the text Jameson applies a variety of terms to the Virgin's educational progress. The Virgin is first said to possess "intellectual power;" to be "most rarely gifted in mind" and "intellectual" (xl). Further on the term "intellect" is replaced by "wisdom"—"tender woman's wisdom" which enables Mary to guide Christ wisely in His early development (xl-xlii). The lactating and suckling Madonna is seen to represent the transference of knowledge from mother to Son by which Christ "increased in wisdom" (63). Finally the Virgin is said to be "skilled in all feminine accomplishments" (154), a remark that finds echoes in Victorian art and rhetoric<sup>1</sup> but would seem not to apply so readily to the Scripture-studying Mary represented in Gerardine's etching.

The structure of the work also suggests that a feminist direction is to be pursued, with four parts of the third section, "Historical Subjects," devoted to the Madonna alone as compared to one part of the second section, "Devotional Subjects," concerned with representations of the Mother and Child. However, any "feminist" intention is significantly overshadowed in the text itself by an increasing emphasis on the Virgin's domestic duties. Indeed Jameson has been accused of trading a potentially feminist position for "a restatement of traditional notions of the moral and religious responsibilities of women" (Fraser 83). Admittedly Jameson does shift in focus quite

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<sup>1</sup> For example in D.G. Rossetti's painting *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848) (fig.2) and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*.

abruptly from independent "WOMAN" to "MOTHER" suddenly declaring that her "ideal" is Raphael's *Madonna di San Sisto*, a Madonna-with-child (xlii). She refers to this Madonna as "the transfigured woman, at once completely human and completely divine, an abstraction of power, purity and love, poised on the empurpled air"(xlii). Jameson claims that she could fill an entire volume with portraits of the Virgin and Child, and that her intention throughout *Legends of the Madonna* is to revive interest in the Virgin as mother, a theme dulled by the mass availability of the image. Thus, in spite of her stated intention to present the Virgin in a new and different light, Jameson closes the section "Devotional Subjects" with an allusion to the divine and earthly aspects of the Virgin Mary. In her paradoxical combination of chastity and maternity the Virgin symbolised for Victorians the pinnacle of womanhood. However, in the context of Jameson's attitudes to maternity, education and writing, the shift in focus from independence to maternity can alternatively be seen to represent a series of transitions between different stages of creative development, rather than as a compromise of women's autonomy; although the shift is abrupt it perhaps signals a progression in the Virgin's history rather than a fracture in Jameson's argument. Such a perspective is based on Jameson's "creed" which offers a non-biological view of maternity and informs her opinions regarding mass education.

In *Legends of the Madonna* Jameson presents the Virgin's history as progressive. The intellectual pursuits suggested in the etching made by Gerardine give way to the acquisition and transference of wisdom associated with effective mothering. This approach is central to the Victorian view of motherhood which held that the most crucial stage of a child's education was undertaken at its mother's breast:

Mothers were the ones who, through affectionate bonding, inculcated the sense of self that their children would need to succeed. They nurtured children at the breast and in the schoolroom, and perhaps more importantly, they conveyed . . . values directly to children in a way that servants were incapable of doing. [Nineteenth-century] motherhood became a moral, intellectual, and emotional pursuit. It became a woman's greatest source of dignity and emotional satisfaction. This was certainly not true earlier, when motherhood only required that one produce children—an autonomous act of the constitution that necessitated breeding but no brains. (Lewis 225)

The impact of a female writer combining ideas of nurture and education ought not to be underestimated. Suckling as a literal and metaphorical concept is common in Jameson's presentation of the Madonna, and is likely to have informed her attitudes towards education. The manifestation of motherly devotion most dear to Jameson is embodied in the image of the "Madonna della Misericordia," the "mother of all suffering humanity" (*Legends* 3-5). She declares a personal affinity with the Madonna who educates the masses through the symbol of her milk, who expresses a social conscience for the suffering, who particularly seeks to sustain women and children, and who stands aloft with her arms outstretched declaring her universal motherhood (5).





Fig.2 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848)

A clue to the comparative success of *Legends of the Madonna* may lie in Jameson's maternal concern for the education of others, that is, by avoiding the dominating rhetoric of her male peers she draws alongside the readers to *learn* as well as to teach. Desiring to "lead the lover of Art . . . to new sources of pleasure" and to "lead the mind to some perception of the artist in his work," she undertakes to illuminate all aspects of the Virgin for the benefit of the uninformed (150). That Jameson viewed herself primarily as an educator of a wider population of Victorians, particularly women for whom viewing art had become a fairly recent pastime, is not legitimated only in *Legends of the Madonna* but also in a variety of other art historical works in which she makes this intention clear. She claims in the preface to *Sacred and Legendary Art* that it is written "for the unlearned" with the "idea of instructing" (vii) and states in the introduction that "with a growing passion for the works of Art of the Middle Ages, there

has arisen among us a desire to comprehend the state of feeling which produced them" (1-2). According to John Steegman, "one of the cardinal principles of the mid-century . . . [was] that public amusement should be combined with education. Pleasure with instruction was what the masses needed" (230-31).

Jameson advocated exposure to artworks as a pathway to education. In the introduction to her *Companion to the Most Celebrated Private Galleries of Art in London* (1844) she notes: "In the midst of . . . quackery and ignorance, there [is] still something *truly* respectable in the wish to possess books and pictures. . . . The wish to possess is followed by delight in the possession. What we delight in, we love; and love becomes in time a discriminating and refined appreciation" (xxvii). In *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art In and Near London* (1840) she states that "a national gallery—is not merely for the pleasure and civilisation of our people, but also for their instruction in the value and significance of art" (13). The link between galleries and education is often made explicit in nineteenth-century gallery handbooks written by both men and women. However, Jameson's guides to the private and public galleries of London seem to have appealed particularly to women, as attested to by several similar books subsequently published by women who refer to and directly quote from her work.<sup>2</sup>

Jameson's perspective on art education has been deemed "middlebrow" and thought to reflect her gender position as a female art critic among men of the Academy who were publishing "highbrow" masculinist interpretations of Renaissance art and artists (Lew 831-32). The fact that women more readily admitted to their use of Jameson's works was probably due to Ruskin's pervasive influence as a dictator of public taste among intellectual men—and his open disdain for Jameson's art criticism (Ludley 33). Women were less reticent in admitting their debt to her. Bessie Rayner Parkes, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and Adelaide Procter, all members of the so-called "Langham Place Group," openly acknowledged her literary influence and deemed her a type of "mother" in her relationship to them (Lacey 59-63, 216; Robinson 71).

The Virgin Mary in both her pre-maternal and maternal states is a powerful role model for educated women if one assumes, as Jameson clearly does, that education is a precursor to creation. For Jameson the creative product is usually written text. The Virgin as consumer of written text finds echoes in Renaissance art. As Ruth Vanita writes, "Western art constructs Mary in symbiotic relationship with the written word. . . . St Anne's conception of Mary is frequently represented in the same way as is Mary's conception of Christ—alone, concentrating on a book" (31). The appearance of the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin who holds or studies a book is a frequent rendition of the Annunciation (Jameson, *Legends* 167-69). The implication is not only that the announcement of Mary's conception of Christ is a fulfilment of the Scriptures she holds, but that the conception of ideas parallels the conception of a child.

The Virgin as producer of text is a less common but not unknown representation. Vanita notes that in Botticelli's *Madonna of the Magnificat* (c.1480) Mary holds the infant Christ on one arm while with her free hand she inscribes the Magnificat onto a book (32). The celebration of Christ's conception is Mary's reason for composing the

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<sup>2</sup> For example Kate Thompson's *Public Picture Galleries of Europe* (1880) and Mrs Henry Jenner's *Christian Symbolism* (1910).

text, but in so far as He is also God He is the inspiration—the Muse—behind her writing. Muses are traditionally female, so Christ as Muse is the embodiment of the feminine inherited from His mother who was educated and subsequently educates Him. Hence conception and birth become a metaphor for the production of text by women. The composition and editing of a text for publication becomes analogous with the birth, suckling and nurture of a child who in turn becomes a citizen of the wider community. In the nineteenth century Sarah Ellis, echoing Mary Wollstonecraft half a century earlier, stressed the importance of educating children towards dutiful citizenship (Ellis 65). In *Legends of the Madonna* the Virgin's life as examined in art and literature parallels these ideals. St Anne educates Mary who continues her education in the temple where she also educates other girls. Following the conception, creation and birth of Christ, Mary instructs Him. Later she shares in His Passion, after which she regains her independence and assists her followers, initially in her human form and later as Queen of Heaven.

Two famous nineteenth-century representations of the Virgin by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848) (fig.2) and *Ecce Ancille Domini!* (1850), do not rigidly conform to Renaissance iconography or to Jameson's presentation of the Madonna. Yet the influence of both is evident. Rossetti selects two familiar subjects from Renaissance art for his only paintings of the Virgin: her education for his 1848 work and the Annunciation for his 1850 painting. Jameson's role in this choice is not insignificant: David Ludley has shown the direct influence of Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art* on several of Rossetti's works (29-30). Although he does not specifically mention *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* in the context of that argument, Jameson's influence is apparent in terms of the characterisation of the two women and Rossetti's use of iconography (Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art* 121-24).

Rossetti's Virgin in the Annunciation scene does not hold a book, nor does his Virgin being educated study one. In *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* Mary is suspended in girlhood with her "accomplishment" task of embroidery; her books are closed, her gaze distant, and she is surrounded by motifs indicative of her impending motherhood. Especially in the light of a sonnet attached to the frame of the original work, the trappings of scholarship convey a sense of resignation to her destiny rather than the energetic ambition that frequently characterises Jameson's descriptions of the Virgin. Lines in the sonnet seem to suggest that the closed volumes rather preserve the Virgin from knowledge of the world than inform her of it. Rossetti writes:

The book (whose head  
Is golden Charity, as Paul hath said)  
Those virtues are wherein the soul is rich:  
Therefore on them the lily standeth, which  
Is Innocence being interpreted. (Qtd Adams 35)

According to Steven Adams, Rossetti declared the needlework "a [pastime] likely for a young woman of the period" (35). Adams, however, does not provide a source for Rossetti's remark. Although Mary's own gaze, which is directed towards the tomes or beyond them, suggests her lack of interest in the task at hand, the composition of the

painting draws the viewer's focus from the books to the needlework in progress. Rossetti's picture of the Virgin at her sewing is in keeping with an artistic tradition that depicts the Virgin spinning or weaving thread to create a tapestry. In a twelfth-century fresco fragment of the Annunciation, for example, she "spins destiny" (Baring and Cashford 560). A fifteenth-century work *The Virgin Spinning* (c.1400) makes explicit the connection between the two levels of the Virgin's creativity: the spindle and thread pass directly through the infant in her womb. This imagery implies that Mary is "spinning the fabric of her body": the child Jesus (560-61).

The fact that the studious Virgin under the watchful eye of her mother became a popular subject among Renaissance artists, and was adopted by Rossetti in the nineteenth century, suggests that St Anne's involvement in her daughter's development was implied even when her figure was omitted from a representation. As the frontispiece shows the Virgin studying in the temple, the omission of St Anne is understandable. Perhaps, given that numerous Renaissance works portray the Madonna under her mother's tutelage prior to her years in the temple, there was a general assumption that the temple teachers took over the Virgin's education from St Anne.

Gerardine's signature evident in the corner of her etching, her relationship with Jameson at the time the copy was made, and Jameson's use of the variation "St Anna" (her own name) throughout the text in place of the usual St Anne, all suggest that Jameson saw herself as responsible in a maternal sense for Gerardine's education. The relationship between Jameson, Gerardine and the female readership is reflected in the relationships between St Anne, the Virgin and ordinary women. St Anne's direct influence over her daughter ceased from the time Mary entered the temple. In a similar way Jameson's influence diminished from the time of Gerardine's marriage until she became a mother. St Anne disappears for a time from artworks representing the Virgin's life (notably from the time Mary enters the temple until after the nativity), yet re-emerges in works depicting the infant Jesus with Mary. For example, in Leonardo da Vinci's *St Anne with the Virgin and Child* (c.1508-10) (fig.3), Mary is enthroned upon her mother's knee and reaches down to lift the Christ child who plays with a lamb at her feet. The construction of this image is interesting in terms of the way Jameson views education and maternity. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford write that "Mary sits [in St Anne's lap] in a curious sideways posture as though she were part of her mother's body." They further remark that "the positioning of their feet, so that Mary's foot seems to be Anne's and Anne's seems to be Mary's, refers us to a tradition of inheritance from one perennial source" (592-93). Thus in this picture the Virgin is an extension of Anne's influence, as one mother imitates another.

Images of the Virgin enthroned with the infant Christ to which Jameson devotes many pages of exposition in *Legends of the Madonna* might appear merely to emphasize maternal devotion. However, in iconographic terms they contain an important piece of symbolism in the form of the throne on which Mary is seated, the seat of wisdom. This posture is also reminiscent of St Sophia—"sophia" meaning wisdom—who is feminine and usually enthroned.<sup>3</sup> In the da Vinci painting the older mother St Anne takes the

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<sup>3</sup> Baring and Cashford also draw attention to the ancient connection between the Virgin Mary and Sophia (609-17).

place of the throne, potentially becoming the seat of wisdom for the younger mother. This interpretation can be applied not only to Jameson's relationship with Gerardine but also to the widely held Victorian belief that feminine skills and information were passed from mother to daughter.

Jameson tends to employ "intellect" and "wisdom" interchangeably towards the end of the introduction, but thereafter associates intellect with the individual woman and wisdom with her maternal role. Hence the shift from intellect to wisdom coincides in *Legends of the Madonna* with a textual transition from the Virgin's girlhood to the birth of Christ. According to Jameson it is wisdom as opposed to information that Mary transfers to her Child. The Madonna enthroned on the seat of Wisdom, often grasping the Book of Wisdom in her hand (Santa Maria dell'Libro), the omniscient Infant in turn enthroned on her knee, marks a shift in emphasis from intellectual individuality to maternal devotion. At this point she might be seen to have emerged as "the angel in the house." Given the nature of her education however, a different interpretation of the Virgin's maternal role is equally possible.

In *Sappho and the Virgin Mary* (1996) Vanita has explored the analogy between "conception" in terms of thoughts and ideas and "conception" in terms of pregnancy. She discusses the feminisation of conception as it relates to ideas—traditionally a male province—referring to a number of Renaissance works in which Mary's expression suggests profound thought. Vanita also notes the Virgin's intense concentration where she is represented with books or similar texts. While she is quite correct in her observations in this respect, Vanita maintains a separation between the two interpretations of "conception" even though she suggests that women might share the male domain of language. I would argue, and Jameson's approach seems to bear this out, that the Child in the case of Christ is not only a creative product in keeping with the analogy of artistic and reproductive creativity but is, uniquely among offspring, the *embodiment* of words. Indeed He is the incarnation of the Word as stated in the Gospel of St John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The infant Christ becomes a type of text created of and by Woman in relation to God but not to man. Thus it is possible to view Mary's scholarship and her maternity as one and the same. This is hardly an exaggeration in Jameson's case. On several occasions she refers to her texts as offspring, though unlike the Christ-child who is perfect she perceives her own productions as deficient, even deformed. In correspondence of 1834 Jameson complains that "in the midst of all this, to hurry forward the printing of my poor little book, which will come into the world like a premature child, if not still-born—then you can believe that for seven weeks I have never been to bed before three or four in the morning, and am almost worn out" (MacPherson 94). Jameson's correlation between premature birth and publishing<sup>4</sup> demonstrates her philosophy regarding the supreme test of maternal success—the ability to nurture one's progeny to maturity. Viewing herself as the producer or "mother" of her "little book" Jameson claims responsibility for its development and anticipates its reception with trepidation. She expresses her fear of literary failure not in terms of

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<sup>4</sup> This was acknowledged by Gerardine, who had herself had personal experiences with, and therefore sensitivity to, issues of neonatal and postnatal death (Robinson 69).

conception but in the sense of the survival or vitality of an infant. The writer does not describe herself as an infertile vessel but sees her produce as potentially lacking vigour after it leaves her protection. In an era when a woman's greatest sense of achievement or failure was inevitably attached to maternity it is fascinating that Jameson should have verbalised the fear of literary failure in terms of neonatal immaturity or fatality.

The parallels between creative production and female reproduction have long been recognised. Bonnie Zimmerman claims that George Eliot's childless liaison with George Lewes resulted in "the birth of George Eliot the novelist" (85). In this context, Zimmerman notes, Lewes "adopted the conceit of books as children," and she quotes Lewes as having said of Eliot that "she will rock the cradle of the new 'little stranger' with fresh maternal vigour" (85). Many years earlier in a letter to Karl August Varnhagen von Ense (19 November 1846) Lewes' conceit is revealed as an extended metaphor for literary production set in the context of an announcement of the birth of his son by his first wife, Agnes: "Since my last, my little wife has brought me another boy who follows in the flourishing path of his brothers; and my other wife—the Muse—has also been safely delivered of a small infant, a portrait of which I send herewith" (qtd 136). Coined in the nineteenth century, the term "bookbirth" (85) perfectly describes the process of writing as perceived by "maternal" writers like Jameson. Jameson's lively advocacy of a Catholic icon such as the Virgin as a role model for young women was radical in spite of the popularity of the Madonna theme. As Vanita observes, in a predominantly Protestant population "the necessarily underground nature of the Marian model in Victorian society is appropriate" because of its "Catholic associations and . . . its connotations of female power and intellectual and sexual autonomy" (36). Apart from its Catholic origins the displacement of men in the Marian model, as in Jameson's models of maternity and education, was not particularly welcomed by Victorian society.

Jameson's philosophy restricts the participation of men in women's work and relationships. Her own life is a case in point as she lived separately from her husband for almost their entire married life and sought friendships with a variety of women from a range of social classes. In the Virgin's history her father and husband both play extremely minor roles. Hence the Virgin Mary, like educated women, prostitutes, nuns and women writers, was often viewed as transgressive in the nineteenth century. Same-sex intimacy limited progeniture and so throughout the period non-Catholics vehemently denounced convents, associations of female writers and homoerotic female relationships. Significantly, in addition to writing about the Virgin, Jameson produced other successful works on "threatening" subjects. In a public "letter" entitled "Sisters of Charity" (1855) she advocated the establishment of non-religious female communities through which philanthropic works might be executed. Her *Legends of the Monastic Orders* (1850) was possibly less widely acclaimed given its relative obscurity to date. It examines and celebrates the lives of female saints, most of whom lived in communities, were well educated and celibate.

In one of her pamphlet publications titled "Woman's Mission and Woman's Position" (1846) Jameson had declared that not only utility but also utilisation should be the outcome of women's education. She asks: "What is the use of instituting a system of education if you continue a state of things in which that education is useless?—which renders it impossible for the woman to practise what the child has learned?" (225). In

*Legends of the Madonna* the Virgin progresses from a young girl gaining her education, to a mother imparting wisdom to her children, to a woman offering instruction and philanthropic assistance to others, especially other women. This for Jameson constitutes the correct use of a woman's education. Yet the experiment with her own Virgin Mary prototype had in a sense failed with Gerardine's marriage. The anguish for Jameson associated with this failure was painfully evident to Gerardine when they again collaborated to complete *Legends of the Madonna* in 1850. Gerardine wrote in retrospect of the changes in their relationship:

The execution of ... etchings ... brought us once more into something of our old relations, as I again worked under her direction in paths so familiar; yet how great was the difference! The contrast between the young inexperienced girl who had filled the same place nearly a dozen years before, and the woman who was now herself a mother and mistress of a family, immersed in all the cares which attend maturing life, struck myself with sufficient force, but must have made a still more painful impression of change upon her, the dear and ever indulgent director of the work; too clear-sighted not to see the divided attention which was all I now had to give her; too loving and sympathising not to forgive, but at the same time too sensitive not to feel the contrast. I cannot myself look back upon this temporary reunion without a keen pang of sympathy with her for the change she must have experienced in it, and of admiration for the doubly tender silence which she maintained on the subject, never increasing my semi-remorseful consciousness by any betrayal of her own. (Macpherson 298-99)

To Gerardine, and perhaps also to her aunt, her education seems to have been misspent in maternal obligations. Yet, like the Madonna, Gerardine too regained her independence, publishing what still remains one of the definitive Jameson biographies, *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (1887).

In Gerardine's frontispiece to *Legends of the Madonna* the Virgin is captured in a creative moment, a moment prior to her conception of either creative ideas or a Child. Implied in this sketch is the presence of the "great" mother whose instruction pervades Mary's nurture of Christ just as her education informs her composition of independent text. Thus, although the figure of the Madonna was frequently pressed into service as a type of sentimentalised motherhood, the potential to identify with the more radical aspects of her nature prevailed in the fact of her non-biological ability to create and to remain above all the educated Virgin.

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**Fig.3** Leonardo da Vinci, *St Anne with the Virgin and Child* (c.1508-10)



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