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## ***Mythical and Biblical Allusions in W.T. Stead's New Journalism***

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### Abstract

In the late-nineteenth century, William Thomas Stead innovated Victorian reporting with his controversial and “featherbrained” New Journalism. His techniques included bold headlines and sub-headings, maps and diagrams of seedy locations, and scandalous topics including political corruption and prostitution. As a religious crusader, Stead used the platform of the press to both attack and attract wealthy and Christian upper-class readers to help spark reform. In two of his most famous works, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” and *If Christ Came to Chicago*, Stead targets these educated, elitist readers with allusions to the Bible, mythology, and legendary figures and places. These allusions provide a contrast to the uncensored interviews and investigations of poverty and hypocrisy, as well as aide the upper-class readers in understanding the message Stead sends. Calling Chicago’s Christians as contributors to the Apostasy or comparing London’s child prostitutes to the child sacrifices to the Minotaur are ways Stead provokes sympathy, guilt, and outrage from the Christian aristocracy. His allusions were an important technique in helping support the publicity and popularity of “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” and *If Christ Came to Chicago* and ultimately, creating change through the press.

### Mythical and Biblical Allusions in W.T. Stead's New Journalism

Walk into any drugstore or gas station and there is likely to be a stand or shelf displaying a variety of news media, such as magazines and newspapers. If it appears to be anything but factual journalism, one can use the definitions Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda in *The Art of Fact* use to determine what serves as journalism. They claim that journalism must be factual, a publication of “active fact-gathering” and current (14). This model has been used in print media and news outlets for decades, with some of the most significant pieces and writers placed in the category of “literary journalism.” Edd Applegate states in *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary of Writers and Editors* that literary journalism has characteristics that distinguish it from regular journalism. First, most literary journalism differs in style, language, and form. A more significant difference is the involvement and relationship of the reporter to the subject matter (xvi). These differences make literary journalism the characteristic—according to Ezra Pound—of being “news that stays news” (Kerrane and Yagoda 20).

Writers who contributed to literary journalism were pioneers of the field, providing innovative techniques and even creating new sub-genres. *The Art of Fact* states that these innovations include narrative journalism, where the reporter recreates an event in the style of narrative fiction; the reporter as a character, where the reporter puts himself or herself at the forefront of the story; and “style as substance” (15), where writers experiment with the voice, chronology, or syntax of the story (15-16). According to the *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, one of the most influential sub-genres emerged in Victorian England and involved explicit, brash, reform-minded human-interest stories that writers sold to the “busy man or woman” whenever they could. Topics included sports, crime, gossip, sex scandals, and political corruption (443). In the 1887 article “Up to Easter,” Matthew Arnold gave this type of writing a name: New Journalism. While Arnold believed the style had much to recommend it, he believed that New Journalism “represented the worst elements of democratic leveling” and brought journalism down, rather than raising it up to the standards of literature or criticism (Brake and Demoor 24). “Featherbrained,” is the term Arnold used to sum up his stance on New Journalism and its creator, William Thomas Stead (qtd. in Kerrane and Yagoda 17).

Born in the north of England in 1849, W. T Stead created controversy in both England and America by publishing investigations and detailed reports concerning subjects like hypocrisy, child prostitution, and the greed of the upper class. Sydney Robinson’s biography of Stead: *Muckraker: The Scandalous Life and Times of W.T. Stead, Britain's First Investigative Journalist*, states that Stead once told his father that he wanted God to give him a big whip so he could “go round the world and whip the wicked out of it” (14). According to Robinson, Stead showed an irrepressible Puritan sense of justice from an early age. His firm Christian beliefs came from his Protestant upbringing, as his father was the minister of a Congregationalist church, and vigor for crusades came from his mother, who led campaigns against the controversial contagious disease act, which required prostitutes living in garrison towns to have compulsory medical examinations (2-3). In addition to these influences, Stead found his love of newspapers through the writing of Richard Hutton, heterodox theologian and editor of the *Spectator* magazine (15).

Though he only had two years of formal schooling, Stead found work at *The Northern Echo*, a journal based in Darlington (Brake and Demoor 598). Robinson states that one of Stead’s earliest articles about alms-giving was criticized for not being “well written” (15), but it was the beginning of

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Stead's signature tabloid style because of its clear prose and ability to annoy the upper-class readers, who thought Stead was trying too hard to stir them into action (15-16). Brake and Demoor claim that by 1871, Stead was the youngest newspaper editor in England and transformed *The Northern Echo* into a nationally renowned journal (598) with articles unafraid to showcase Stead's disdain and rejection of "society editors" and writing styles the upper class were used to (Robinson 27). According to Joseph Baylen in *The Journal of American History*, his work with *The Northern Echo* was so successful that it helped spark the Bulgarian Horrors agitation<sup>1</sup> and contributed to statesman William E. Gladstone's return to political power in 1876 (418).

Under Gladstone's recommendation, Stead left the north and went to work at a building on Northumberland Street, London, which was home to *The Pall Mall Gazette* newspaper (Robinson 48). Stead became co-editor of the paper, forming a partnership with high-minded editor John Morley (Brake and Demoor 598). Robinson states that this newspaper, commonly called the *PMG*, was known at the time as "written for gentlemen by gentlemen," (41) which was the opposite of what Stead thought a newspaper should be because it was meant to appeal to those who avoided the vulgarity of other newspaper and please the rich and powerful. Though Stead loathed how the paper was meant to woo statesmen, aristocrats, and gentlemen of "Thackerian mold,"<sup>2</sup> it would become an advantage to him to test his crusades and new techniques on the upper-class of London (40-41).

Stead added life to the serious newspaper with bold headlines, interviews, subheadings, indices, illustrations, and specials, all with the intent to go against the aristocratic writing style and make the paper more accessible to the public (Brake and Demoor 443). He also added simple maps and diagrams, something rare to newspapers at the time, and worked on expanding the *PMG*'s morning news and gossip "Occasional Notes" sections (Robinson 49). All of these innovations were combined with Stead's favorite topic in order to crusade on behalf of moral and political causes: scandal.

Stead's goal was to use scandal to influence his readers to the direction of his Christian ideals in order to promote what he called, according to an *Albion* journal article by Carolyn Malone, "government by journalism" (50). To make changes, Stead needed to seize the attention of his readers in a unique way. His approach to scandal journalism had to provide shock and draw in wealthy Christians. Robinson states that many of his campaigns included lurid facts and figures that exposed poverty and corruption and attacked the rich readers who contributed or profited from the issues (56-

57). These articles gained him much public attention as well as the annoyance of the elite, who expected the *PMG* to pander to them instead of making them feel guilty (67). Benjamin Waugh, a contemporary of Stead, wrote that Stead's

[...] one desire has been to get at the people. He has no faith in the professional statesmen or party politicians, or newspaper writers, or clubs. He believes in the tribunal to which the mountain-born of man of Palestine appeared, who said, 'Ye ought to judge in yourselves': the common people's heart. It is fullest of natural simplicities and, therefore, instinctively truer to truth and God. (*A Life for the People*)

One way Stead chose to "get at the people" was not just call out hypocritical upper-class readers, but by also playing to their faith and education to promote his causes. Much like the *PMG*, many newspapers in Britain and America catered to the elite, and according to an article by Christopher Kent in the *Victorian Studies* journal, educated clerisy with what was called "higher journalism," which included high quality opinion pieces and reviews that appealed to university scholars and aristocrats (181-185). Robinson states that Stead never went to university, but in his years of formal schooling he learned Latin, Hebrew, French, and German. Whenever he could, he visited the Mechanic's Institute Library, a place founded by the mercantile elite in the 1820s and for six shillings a year, Stead could access books on ancient history, science, religion, and music (12).

This information helped Stead prepare for writing to the upper-class Christians. Trygve Tholfsen explains in an article for *History of Education Quarterly* that during the Victorian era, most Christians attended Sunday school beginning at an early age. They were taught the importance of piety, faith, and prayer as well as virtues including honesty, obedience, humility, and diligence (80). Though they initially taught that eternal life as a divine gift, by the mid-Victorian era, these Sunday schools taught that moral behavior led to a reward of eternal life (88). This placed more responsibility on Christians to be involved in charities, philanthropic organizations, or moral crusades. Tholfsen also mentions that another important tendency of many Victorian Sunday schools was that they also focused on the positive and hopeful side of life, and taught that the dark, somber parts of life should be screened out, especially when concerning the middle and lower classes (83).

While Sunday schools taught the importance of virtuous deeds and piety to citizens rich and poor, not all citizens received the same formal education. Robinson states that The Education Act of 1870 entitled free elementary education to children for the first time in British history (21); however,

this did not grant lower class citizens to the same education of middle and upper-class citizens. Instead, the Act covered, according to the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, “sound and cheap elementary instruction” (169), while private schooling for the aristocracy allowed for deeper learning. The Act also did not become fully implemented and beneficial to children until another ten to twenty years when elementary education became compulsory. While the Act increased literacy among the lower-class citizens, allowing them to read the tabloids, the wealthier classes could afford education that involved more difficult literature and historical writing (Middleton 174).

With this knowledge, Stead had what he needed to write to educated, wealthy Christians. In addition to shattering the positive, sentimental outlook, readers were taught in Sunday schools by exposing London’s harsh realities, allusions to myths, the Bible, and ancient morality stories could be the tools Stead could use for his capturing the attention of his upper-class readers. Stead wrote his series, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” in four installments for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, all following his descent into London’s streets where child prostitution thrived. According to Robinson, from an early age Stead had sympathy for prostitutes because for one of his first jobs, he had to walk through a notorious district in town and watch the prostitutes who he called “wretched ruins of humanity, women stamped and crushed into devils by society” (11). With this sympathy and anger towards “ruling class gentlemen” who frequented London’s brothels, Stead set out to make “Maiden Tribute” his most aggressive installment yet. (73-74). The first installment, published in 1885, focused specifically on the details of the horrific acts placed upon young girls within the sex trade. Stead gleaned this information from interviews and witnessing these acts in person. In this installment, Stead uses places, figures, and events from legends, myths, and the Bible in order to amplify his message and target the upper-class readers.

To set the scene, Stead opens “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” by retelling Ovid’s account of the Greek myth of the labyrinth in Crete, where Athenian youths were sent as sacrifices to the Minotaur who lived within the maze. Stead writes,

In ancient times, if we believe the myths of Hellas, Athens, after a disastrous campaign, was compelled by her conqueror to send once every nine years a tribute to Crete of seven youths and seven maidens. The doomed fourteen, who were selected by lot amid the lamentations of the citizens, returned no more. (1)

In these opening sentences, Stead states that the Athenians gave up fourteen of their children bitterly and unwillingly every nine years. In contrast, he states that London sacrifices its children to horrors like the labyrinth every night and in numbers seven times as many as the Athenians. The allusion shames London, and casts the readers as uncaring, ignorant parents with the child prostitutes as sacrifices. Stead continues to reference Crete and the myth throughout “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” as a reminder of how desolate of a situation the young prostitutes are in and how the citizens are partly responsible. For example, in the third installment, Stead explains that it is easy to get into brothels, but hard to get out. He says “The labyrinth of London, like that of Crete, has many chambers and underground passages; the clue that leads to the entrance is easily broken” (79).

Stead also alludes to Christian imagery from the Bible and uses the works of Dante to show how far London has fallen. He writes,

London beneath the gas glare of its innumerable lamps became, not like Paris in 1793—“a naphtha-lighted city of Dis”—but a resurrected and magnified City of the Plain, with all the vices of Gomorrah, daring the vengeance of long-suffering Heaven. It seemed a strange, inverted world, that in which I lived those terrible weeks—the world of the streets and of the brothel. It was the same, yet not the same, as the world of business and the world of politics. (7)

Here, he compares Paris during the year of 1793 to the city of Dis, a city from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* that encompasses the final four circles of Hell. Stead goes further by saying that Paris is nothing compared to London’s corruption; London is the sinful city of Gomorrah. Through this allusion, Stead inserts a sly threat that London is doomed for destruction if continues down this path. This not ignites fear and uneasiness in the readers, but possibly a sense of urgency to stop the obliteration before it’s too late.

Stead sprinkles these allusions throughout the installments, with the language of mythology and Scripture contrasting with crude confessions of a brothel keeper, Stead’s own account of purchasing of a child, and descriptions of different ways the law allows abduction and rape of children. In one section, Stead calls out a retired doctor who spends his money on virgin prostitutes; Stead gives him the title the direct incarnation of the Cretan Minotaur. In the same section, Stead lists other wealthy London gentlemen who participate in purchasing children and affirms that their

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actions make them worse than the Minotaur (82-83). In the fourth installment, Stead explains that it is not just British girls who are sacrificed in the London labyrinth. Women from Belgium, France, and Germany are tricked into the sex trade through employment agencies offering jobs as governesses, maids, or higher positions in jobs they already have. Throughout this installment, Stead places blame on the police and the government for protecting systems that import the women, and then treating the women as criminals. Concluding interviews with several foreign girls seduced into prostitution, Stead writes,

Prostitution in England is Purgatory; under the State regulated system which prevails abroad it is Hell. The foreign traffic is the indefinite prolongation of the labyrinth of modern Babylon, with absolute and utter hopelessness of any redemption. When a girl steps over the fatal brink she is at once regarded as fair game for the slave trader who collects his human 'parcels' in the great central mart of London for transmission to the utmost ends of the earth. They move from stage to stage, from town to town-bought exchanged, sold-driven on and ever on like the restless ghosts of the damned, until at last they too sleep "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."  
(105)

In this passage, Stead ends with a quote from the book of Job to explain how death is the only escape and relief for these imprisoned women, and how their lives are at best, a state of Limbo and at worst, Hell on Earth. Even with death finally ending the suffering, it does not end the problem. For Stead, the influx of foreign prostitutes only makes London a bigger labyrinth and makes it harder for any progress to be made for a better future.

Even though Stead uses these allusions to stir up anger, guilt, sympathy, and shock among his readers, he also uses them to promote hope for a better future. He writes,

Nevertheless, I have not yet lost faith in the heart and conscience of the English folk, the sturdy innate chivalry and right thinking of our common people; and although I am no vain dreamer of Utopias peopled by Sir Galahads and vestal virgins, I am not without hope that there may be some check placed upon this vast tribute of maidens, unwitting or unwilling, which is nightly levied in London by the vices of the rich upon the necessities of the poor. (8)

To Stead, there will always be sin and corruption in London and social justice will not turn it into Camelot or the Roman House of the Vestals, but some effort and action can free London of its title of “Modern Babylon” and its citizens can have their merit as pure, good Christians restored. This passage is meant to make the readers feel a sense of hope that they are not doomed like Sodom and Gomorrah, but instead have a chance to redeem themselves. Stead places this glimmer of hope in the first installment, as if to light the way through the gruesome details and hypocrisy he is about to expose. The passage also serves as a call to action by showing the readers that making change will not be hard; they do not have to try to turn London into something unattainable like Thomas More’s Utopia.

England was not the only place Stead used his New Journalism to fuel his campaigns. According to Baylen, Stead eventually left the *Pall Mall Gazette* and founded an even more popular periodical, *Review of Reviews*. With the partnership of American Albert Shaw, *Review of Reviews* was published in America as well as England, making it one of the best-known Anglo-American journals at the time (419). In November 1893, Shaw suggested that Stead take a break from the corruption of London; in response, Stead chose to venture to another place he considered to be riddled with prostitution and hypocrisy: Chicago (421-422). Robinson states that after visiting the World Women’s Christian Temperance headquarters and finding common ground with the members over Chicago’s problem with prostitution, Stead set out to shock and crusade for reform for the victims of Chicago’s sins (215-218).

According to Robinson, after conducting interviews and investigations, Stead rented Chicago’s Music Hall to lecture on his findings and ask the people of Chicago what they could do to fix their city’s many problems. The Music Hall sold out, with audience members including reporters, preachers, prostitutes, reformers, and other curious Chicagoans. In his lecture, Stead criticized the wealthy citizens and the city’s state of poverty. He called for the press to name and shame hypocritical and immoral individuals and that adultery and fornication should be made as “inconceivable as incest” (218-220). Baylen states that Stead’s speeches appealed to trade unionists and some church groups, but lost favor with more moderate reform groups, especially when the lecture closed with Socialist leader Thomas Morgan, who threatened the city’s wealthy with dynamite if they did not listen to “the pleadings of Editor Stead” (424). Though Stead’s lectures were hailed as one of the most remarkable ever held in Chicago, many criticized Stead’s frank attitude towards Chicago’s churches



and upper-class (423-426). Stead planned to publish his speeches but after discovering the shorthand writers lost his notes, he decided to produce a book recounting his investigative experiences and pushing his sensational ideas onto the people of Chicago (Robinson 221).

Stead's 1894 book *If Christ Came to Chicago: A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer* served as a collection of interviews and investigative journalism that exposed Chicago's crime and political corruption. Similar to "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," he did this through allusions that would get at upper-class Christians the most, references they would understand and make them feel as though their merit as good Christians was under attack. Baylen explains that the title itself was inspired by the poem *Parable* by one of Stead's muses, James Russell Lowell, (431) and was conceived by Stead as a question to provoke the people of Chicago's values, asking, "If He came to Chicago, what would He think of us and our lives?" (*Christ* ix). The answers come in the form of characters created through interviews and the places he saw that aristocratic readers might be ignorant or apathetic towards.

In the first chapter, Stead describes the squalor and inhumanity of the Harrison Street Police Station. He focuses on the way the tramps and vagrants in the jail are mistreated, giving the details of their poor living conditions and suffering. He mentions his attempts to urge both the upper-class and working-class citizens to improve the treatment of those imprisoned were met with attitudes of indifference and disdain about the subjects. Stead states that these attitudes from Christian are hypocritical (8) and uses an allusion to Genesis to further his point. He writes:

Of course, so long as each city or village or township bases its policy on the question of Cain, nothing can be done. But even in Russia, which so many affect to despise as semi-barbarous and inhuman, they do better than that. For there they christen their tramp a pilgrim and by brotherly kindness and generous hospitality convert every wandering brother into a means of grace. (17)

This statement compares the morals of Christians in Chicago to the morals of Cain, the Biblical figure who denied being his brother Abel's keeper. Instead, of course, Cain was Abel's murderer. Stead goes further by stating that Russia, the nation the Chicagoans probably perceive as Cain, treats their lower-class citizens the way good Christians should.

In another chapter, Stead visits Madame Hastings' brothel and interviews one of the prostitutes, Maggie. Stead gives her the full name "Maggie Darling" and concentrates on her life that

led up to her position in the brothel, evoking empathy by framing her as an innocent victim of hypocrisy and cruelty from people who were supposed to be supportive Christians. Maggie's story alone makes her a sympathetic figure, but Stead amplifies his message by alluding to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve's disobedience and banishment from the Garden of Eden. Maggie Darling's story begins with her account of becoming pregnant and left jobless by her lover, a married man. Stead compares her plight to Eve's:

Her position is one in which some thousands of young women find themselves all over the world at this very moment. She was in the position of Eve after she had eaten the forbidden fruit and had been cast out of the Garden of Eden. It is a modern version of the Fall, and as the Fall led down to destruction, so it was with Maggie Darling. She seemed to be shut up to sin. (30)

Here, Stead does not deny that Maggie has sinned, just like Eve, but he does state that this is a widespread problem many young women deal with. By detailing the struggle and suffering Maggie faced during her months on the streets, pregnant and unemployed, Stead implies that she and women like her deserve understanding. Maggie's story continues with her being hired as a maid to an Irish Catholic woman and Stead compares her new life to the work of the Redeemer and her mistress's home to Paradise (32). However, Maggie's past is discovered, and her Catholic mistress cruelly fires her, sending the girl to Madame Hastings'. Stead sums up Maggie's story as "the Fall to the Redemption to the Apostasy of the church, and the blighting of the hopes of mankind" (27). The allusions turn Maggie and other women in her position into martyrs, and also implies that any reader with hypocritical behavior like the Catholic mistress's is a contributor to the Apostasy, or abandonment, of the church. By giving Christian readers the idea that they failed their duty to be Christ-like, there is a chance that they will try to do better and help poorer citizens instead of judge them.

In *If Christ Came to Chicago*, Stead continues to visit locations where crime and corruption thrive, including City Hall; with each stop he finds a situation or story that supports his crusade for justice. In addition to comparing Chicago and its victims to characters from Genesis, Stead uses allusions from the prophet Isaiah's account of the Assyrians' defeat and conquering of Israel. He uses these references to illustrate the state Chicago is in with its obsession with wealth and political

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corruption, using an addition allusion to compare the people's' lust for money to the quest for the Holy Grail (110). He says,

The more I look into the operations of the laws which have reduced the city of Chicago to this present unendurable position, face to face with the spoiler in the streets, the more I am reminded of the old familiar story of the fate of the Children of Israel after they had established themselves and had waxed fat and comfortable in the Land of Promise. As it was then, when the hosts of Moab and Midian and of Mesopotamians fell upon the chosen people and smote them and spoiled them, so it is today in the city of Chicago. (178)

The Assyrians defeated the Israelites because the kingdom was misgoverned, and its people did nothing for the welfare of the poor. Stead states that the modern Assyrians are big corporations from Philadelphia and other major cities that use their power to take advantage of Chicago's weakened condition (179). The allusion is effective because the aristocratic readers are shown how the consequences of their inhumanity towards the poor affect them. According to Stead, the enemy—the Assyrians—are not bound to the time of Isaiah, but instead are living in the nineteenth century and their Israel is Chicago.

Stead returns to imagery and characters from Greek mythology in the chapter "How the Oracle is Worked." In this chapter, Stead criticizes Chicago's government and calls out the ineptitude and selfishness of the Mayor, the corruption in City Council, and fraudulent tactics politicians use to register citizens for elections. Stead refers to the government as the "Oracle," the famous Pythia of Delphi, and the polling place is "the modern cave of Delphos." Stead urges the moral, educated, and wealthy citizens of Chicago to "consult the oracle," or go into politics themselves, rather than letting the "divine voice" get warped and misinterpreted by the corrupt hierophants who run the polling places. He explains,

The custody of the Delphic cave is left to two sets of partisans, respectively known as Republicans and Democrats, who instead of really desiring to know what the sovereign people have to say, concentrate all their efforts upon the supreme duty of working the oracle so as to make each deliverance tell against their adversaries and in favor of themselves. (310)

Both “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” and *If Christ Came to Chicago* found popularity and criticism. According to Robinson, almost immediately after publication, “Maiden Tribute”, was in such high demand that Northumberland Street was crowded with vendors wanting to make a profit off the sensational publication. However, the lurid headlines and material caused led to some vendors receiving fines for displaying “Maiden Tribute,” which angered Stead, who believed that it was an illegal attack on the freedom of the press (88). Anne Delgado explains in the *Studies in the Literary Imagination* journal that Stead and the *PMG* also received letters of complaints and disapproval for its content and language. Another newspaper, *The St. James Gazette*, called Stead’s installments “the vilest parcel of obscenity” (24) and an article in *The Evening News* referred to them as “a vile insect reared on the putrid garbage of the dunghill” (24).

Robinson mentions that one criticism of Stead’s use of allusions to mythology was for claiming the “London Minotaur” was the unnamed, retired doctor who allegedly preyed on virgins every night. Writer Hugh Kingsmill claimed that Stead’s tactic was inappropriate, and the doctor might not even exist (89). According to Delgado, another opinion of Stead’s critics was that the campaign was pornographic and made the *PMG* inappropriate for respectable or family-oriented people. A similar opinion was that because Stead exposed the lurid tastes of the rich “gentlemen” who took part in child prostitution, he invited readers to enjoy those tastes as well (24). Even writer Lewis Carroll claimed that Stead’s work would corrupt innocent minds and suggested that Stead be thrown in the sea with “a millstone hung around his neck” (Robinson 91). Robinson adds that W. H. Smith, a senior member of the Cabinet and the owner of England’s largest chain of newspapers, responded to this bombardment of criticism by pulling the *Pall Mall Gazette* from the stands and replacing it with *The St. James Gazette* (91). The first installment of “Maiden Tribute”, where Stead bought thirteen-year-old Eliza Armstrong from her parents as an experiment gained so much attention that Stead was prosecuted in a highly publicized trial and forced to serve two months in jail<sup>3</sup> (Kerrane and Yagoda 49).

Despite the numerous complaints and backlash, “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” gained a following of sympathetic readers who agreed that reform was necessary to take down the evil Stead exposed. Deborah Gorham argues that public agitation against child prostitution began several years earlier, but “Maiden Tribute’s” popularity and style sparked a surge of outrage and energy for the movement (354) and reformer’s included Anglican bishops, socialists, women’s suffrage society

representatives (361). Even Queen Victoria, who was a dedicated reader of the *PMG*, sympathized with “Maiden Tribute” (Robinson 100).

In 1885, the Criminal Law Amendment Act proposed to raise the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen, increase restrictions on prostitution, and criminalize sodomy (Delgado 21-25). Robinson argues that in addition to the agitation caused by “Maiden Tribute,” Stead’s imprisonment made him a martyr, with supporters including influential female activists who created a petition of over one thousand signatures lobbying for his release (111). The publicity surrounding the *PMG* and Stead’s imprisonment increased pressure and support for the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which was quickly dubbed “Stead’s Act” (Gorham 354). With the passing of the act, the sensationalist journalism that resulted in so much criticism and disapproval ended up proving to do exactly what Stead had set out to do in the first place. Robinson states that with this success and now the status of a “celebrity journalist,” Stead immediately set out to work on new projects and campaigns (114).

Before publication, Stead received harsh previews for *If Christ Came to Chicago* and with this news, Stead warned Albert Shaw that his book would “provoke a tempest in Chicago” (Baylen 431). This proved to be true: *If Christ Came to Chicago* polarized Americans readers and journalists upon publication. According to Robinson, despite powerful American union news companies banning it from railway stations and carriages, within the first three days it sold over 15,000 copies (221). Baylen states that Chicago newspapers criticized the book for “sensational claptrap” and “indelicacy,” (432) and some even charged Stead with blasphemy. Churches were especially hostile towards Stead. A Presbyterian paper published a statement that condemned Stead for writing “a guide book to the brothels . . . filled with pious nastiness and abuse of the Church and respectable people,” (432) and a Catholic journal accused Stead of irreverence and called *If Christ Came to Chicago* a “a sort of glorified version of himself” (432). Even Shaw refused to promote the book through his journal and told Stead that the book’s unfavorable truths would earn him a prejudice by the American people; Stead responded that the city of Chicago had requested a reform and since American readers were in demand for a second edition of the book, it would appear his influence was still making an impact<sup>4</sup> (432-433).

Much like “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” *If Christ Came to Chicago*’s popularity outraged many, but also sparked a movement in others. According to Baylen, by the time the book sold one hundred thousand copies in Chicago and had started selling in Germany and Sweden, Stead’s

ideas for reform were creating interest and support in many readers, particularly the book's promotion of Stead's program for "social and moral progress", the Civic Church (433). The idea had previously been published in *Review of Reviews* but the popularity and sensation of *If Christ Came to Chicago* allowed for this idea to receive much more attention (421).

Baylen explains that the Chicago Civic Foundation was founded based on the principles Stead presented in his Music Hall speeches and his book and continues to serve as a program upholding Chicago's morality and Stead's insistence for community improvement. In most records of Chicago's past, Stead's crusade is given credit for his influence over the city and the formation of the Civic Foundation. In addition to making an impact in Chicago, the civic movement also inspired other American cities to set up their own foundations and back in his homeland, Stead's influence in Chicago led to the organization of the National Civic Federation of Britain (433-434). Baylen argues that even after the reform movement and sensation faded, the impact of Stead's style in *If Christ Came to Chicago* remained influential with other writer-reformers attempting to use Stead's technique of Jesus and Biblical allusions as emotional appeals and guides in their own novels. Some of these writers included Charles M. Sheldon, Frank Shaw, and Upton Sinclair (434).

W. T. Stead contributions to journalism gave him fame and followers as well as enemies and criticism, but what made him a pioneer in journalism was his idea to transcend beyond using press to just report on crimes and corruption. Instead, Stead chose to make these problems, such as child prostitutes, Christian hypocrites, and corrupt politicians the main characters in his publications. Stead was not the only writer to do this; according to Kerrane and Yagoda, an earlier Victorian writer and literary journalist, Henry Mayhew published vivid interviews with London's "street people" in his 1862 book *London Labour and the London Poor*, but unlike Stead, Mayhew's writing served as a survey of different lower class lives rather than an exposé and campaign for change (34). Other writers included realist novelists Walter Besant, George Gissing, and G. R. Sims who grim depictions of slum life but did not offer any solutions or spur attention like Stead's work did (Robinson 55).

Stead chose to not only write about the seedy wrongdoings in major cities like London and Chicago, but to present all the un-sanitized details and lurid descriptions—along with his blatant opinions on the matter—in a manner that would get attention and call people to action. Once Stead took charge of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the upper-class newspaper turned into a vehicle for eye-popping headlines, scandalous topics, and accusations that London was Gomorrah, the Minotaur's labyrinth,

and Babylon all in one. Any positive outlooks on life Christians were taught in Sunday School were shattered by Stead's descriptions of child prostitutes in purgatory and all the ways the state sanctioned it. For Chicagoans, Stead's visit and book hit them with interviews and investigations that showed them their city was no better run than Israel before the Assyrians took it and if Christ returned, he "would lead directly to the civic and social regeneration of Chicago" (*Christ* xiv).

W. T. Stead shocked his audiences by contrasting blunt language with passages to Biblical scripture and mythology. Using these allusions was effective as a call to action because their additions created contrast with the gritty, uncensored descriptions of corruption and crime, which would shock and create sympathy in some readers. In the case of readers who would be more familiar with the works Stead alludes to, such as the educated upper-class and Christians, the allusions turn what they know against them. The hypocritical upper-class Stead calls out are hit harder when he writes that their deeds turn them into Cain or Athenians who willingly sacrifice their children to the Minotaur. Christian readers are shown by the allusions that their Sunday school values of piety and charity are either not enough or nonexistent. He used the allusions to make these readers feel like bad citizens and bad Christians and whether they reacted with outrage, guilt, or sympathy, his works received more attention and were able to reach more readers.

Robinson states that Stead once reminded his team to at the *PMG* that newspapers are "the only Bible which millions read" and should accordingly provide moral uplift, not just light entertainment or information (54). Though Stead had more than a few radical ideas that did not find a following,<sup>5</sup> his crusades with "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" and *If Christ Came to Chicago* found success due to their popularity and subsequent changes with the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Chicago Civic Foundation. Matthew Arnold complained that thanks to Stead, the newspaper was "fast ceasing to be literature" (qtd. in Robinson 67). While Stead's writing was more digestible than most high society journalism and his content could be melodramatic and vulgar, his New Journalism makes him a literary journalist because his techniques influenced generations of journalists. Any newsstand today should have newspapers and magazines with bold, eye-catching headlines, easy to read tabloids, and detailed feature-interviews. Most important is that Stead's campaigns in London and Chicago hooked readers with sensational writing that did not just tell the readers about the squalor and immorality within their cities but made it a duty for them to make things better. His excessive and blunt language with the use of convicting allusions turned his

scandalous journalism into something immediate and important, and made his work worthy of being called “news that stays news.”

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The Bulgarian Horrors agitation was a series of retaliations in 1876 carried out by Turkish forces in response to a Bulgarian revolt against the Ottoman Empire (Robinson 28).

<sup>2</sup>“Thackerian Mold” refers to the British novelist William Makepeace Thackeray whose believed literary success required acceptance of high society (Robinson 39).

<sup>3</sup>When Stead made his “purchase” of Eliza Armstrong, he illegally took her away from her parents and out her in the care of the Salvation Army. Though Stead denied it, he was charged with kidnapping (Robinson 93-94).

<sup>4</sup>*If Christ Came to Chicago* ended up being one of Stead’s last major campaigns. Later in his life, in 1912, he planned one last crusade where he would attend a meeting of “The Men and Religion Forward Movement” in New York (Robinson 250). His American hosts provided him a with first class ticket for the *Titanic*. Stead was last sighted by a survivor giving his life jacket away to a fellow passenger before standing silently at the edge of the deck (Kerrane and Yagoda 50).

<sup>5</sup>An example of one of Stead’s more extreme ideas was that Chicago’s churches should start selling alcohol; this would put the seedier bars out of business and get their customers into start coming to church (Robinson 218).

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