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## The Queen in the Garden / The Woman of the Streets: The Separate Spheres and the Inscription of Gender

Now that the doctrines of Victorian gender politics have been well documented, criticism is shifting to analyses of the dynamics through which it operated. Linda Shires's recent essay on Tennyson's gender politics, for example, explores the ways that Tennyson's poetry "resists the stable logic of opposition by which Victorian culture defined itself" (57). She has in mind, in particular, the way his poems expose "the binary opposition which structures his entire corpus," the division of masculine and feminine spheres (61). What I want to argue here is that authors like Tennyson do not so much "subvert" the doctrine of spheres by "exposing" its ambiguities and contradictions, as work through the latent structures through which that ideology operates. Only by investigating these contradictions and complications can we fully apprehend the ways in which the doctrine of spheres operated in Victorian culture. I will examine such complications and contradictions at the heart of the essay most often cited as a locus classicus of the doctrine of separate spheres, John Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens." Rather than a simple enunciation of doctrine, it is, I will argue, a complicated intertextual negotiation of tropes, images, and figures from painting and literature, both classical and modern, through which Ruskin attempts to come to grips with contemporary social problems. Ruskin does not escape the limitations of the ideology of separate spheres, but his popular essay can give us insight into the complexities of the doctrine as well as its appeal to his fellow Victorians.

Although the doctrine of spheres was well established long before Ruskin wrote "Of Queens' Gardens," no passage is more often cited to illustrate it than the description of the home and the roles of men and women in this essay. As we will see, the apparently rigorous division of gender roles that this description appears to set forth—"man's power is active, progres-

sive, defensive . . . the woman's power is for rule, not for battle . . . for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision"—almost immediately gets complicated by unexpected ambiguities, which emerge full blown in the conclusion of the essay (Ruskin 18:122). Ruskin begins this closing passage by addressing women as metaphorical gardeners tending flowers and exhorting them to tend not only to the "flowers" in their private gardens, but also to the "feeble florets" outside their garden walls (142-43). Near the end of the passage, he portrays Madeleine, i. e., Mary Magdalen, outside the garden, invited into it by the risen Jesus Christ. At the beginning, the woman is a gardener inside the garden, looking at florets outside; at the end, Christ is the gardener in the garden and Magdalen is outside (144; see John 20:15). The passage thus modulates from the woman in the garden to Christ in the garden, and from the florets outside to Magdalen outside. It is a typical Ruskinian tour de force underlying which is his reading and elaboration of figures and images in William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853, Tate Gallery, London) and *The Light of the World* (1853, Keble College, Oxford), which depict a Magdalen and Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Sarah Ellis's *Women of England* (1839) and Peter Gaskell's *Artisans and Machinery* (1833) illustrate two aspects of the doctrine of separate spheres that I want to emphasize here. The discourse on separate spheres treated contemporary life as a problem, and, thus, assumed that gender ideals, as it depicted them, were threatened or not yet achieved. Even when perfectly content with the political and economic order, this discourse expressed, whether as mere strategy or deep anxiety, dissatisfaction with the nature of the social order. That is to say, the Victorians did not necessarily organize their lives according to the rules offered in Ellis's domestic manuals. But what we can