

# "HELENA'S HOUSEHOLD"

## *James De Mille's Heretical Text*

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C RITICAL STUDIES OF JAMES DE MILLE have tended to centre almost exclusively on *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* or on his long poem, "Behind the Veil," both of them published posthumously. Criticism has also tended to assume that De Mille was religiously conservative. This narrow focus on two works and on an assumed conservatism has had a distorting effect on a fuller view of De Mille. *Strange Manuscript*, for instance, can be read as far from orthodox and more than satire: as denying the basic tenets of Christianity itself. "Behind the Veil" reads like a "Vision Quest," a shamanic out-of-body-experience which finally denies the exclusive claims of any religion. Yet it is easy to assume, in the present critical climate, that in the debate over evolution, for instance, De Mille "would have been on the side of the anti-Darwinists. He had been brought up in an atmosphere of austere evangelical Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

It is important that we open up new directions for De Mille criticism, that we examine what Keefer refers to in a larger Maritime context as "the richness and often problematic diversity of Maritime fiction . . . the alternative values and vision this fiction realizes."<sup>2</sup> A closer examination of an early novel, *Helena's Household*,<sup>3</sup> provides just such an opportunity, with some intriguing insights into De Mille's thought and art. De Mille had difficulties publishing *Helena* and was compelled to make changes in it, largely because its theology was unorthodox. Its inversions and theological discussions give a far different vision of James De Mille than that based only on the current readings of *Strange Manuscript* and "Behind the Veil."

De Mille family tradition, through his nephew L. J. Burpee, tells us that even James felt *Helena's Household* was "an emasculated version of the original novel."<sup>4</sup> Carlton & Porter of New York had already published *Martyr of the Catacombs: A Tale of Ancient Rome* in 1865, apparently the first book De Mille published.<sup>5</sup> It is a conventional story of heroic Christians in the Catacombs of Rome. However, Robert Carter & Bros. was not pleased with the original version of *Helena's Household* which must have been submitted at about the time *Martyr* was in the press. Although the subject is still the persecution of Roman Christians, the editor would not print the novel without changes to several chapters because he "did not consider [they] would prove palatable to the theological thought of the day, however true

they might be historically.”<sup>6</sup> Something had changed in De Mille’s handling of the story of the Roman Christians between *Martyr* and *Helena’s Household*. We do not know exactly what the motive for the change was, but there is sufficient historical and internal evidence to suggest the essentially theological frames of reference with which he was working in this early part of his career.

De Mille made the required changes, but seems to have lapsed into a cynicism that made the writing of future serious books almost impossible.<sup>7</sup> One wonders if De Mille was afraid similar changes would be required of *Strange Manuscript*, written about the same time as *Helena’s Household*, and so did not submit it for publication. Both novels indicate a tremendous struggle within him between the piety of his early years in the Anglican and Baptist Churches and a profound and thoughtful questioning of accepted values and beliefs — questions about how the experience of the Christians in Rome coloured and distorted “the fair humanities of old religion.”<sup>8</sup>

In dealing with such a text, the critic is faced with special problems. Is it possible to determine what De Mille added so he would not offend the theologically conservative reader? And more important, is it possible to derive a sense of De Mille’s original intentions from the present text? There are important implications for understanding De Mille and his other writings in the answers to those questions.

We must also attempt to appreciate a novel which is not at all in tune with late 20th century taste, but which seems to exist for the sole purpose of propounding a theological argument: narrative and dramatic concerns are secondary. M. G. Parks summarizes this emphasis succinctly: “Indeed his tendency to examine at length the interplay of these forces [of first century religion] slows down the action of the novel. His method is to invent characters to express, in intellectual terms and in their lives, the beliefs they uphold.”<sup>9</sup> Readers accustomed to psychological or sociological realism or post-modernist abstraction/concretion might agree with Carole Gerson’s evaluation of the novel as “a turgid reconstruction of first-century Roman life,”<sup>10</sup> or think it, “Almost unreadable today, [since] it appealed to those with a taste for fiction flavoured with a strong sense of piety.”<sup>11</sup> Even De Mille’s artistic objectivity is called into question: “In this pietistic novel De Mille reveals his strong Baptist background. . . . His objectivity suffers in his treatment of early Christianity, both in its doctrinal and ceremonial aspects.”<sup>12</sup>

These readings of the text, however, are an aspect of the critical distortion of seeing De Mille only through the eyes of *Strange Manuscript* and “Behind the Veil” and are contradicted by the novel itself as well as by nineteenth and early twentieth century readings which found it admirable or even “‘far and away the best of De Mille’s novels.’”<sup>13</sup> Except for Parks’ assessment, the evaluations tend to depend on cultural or religious reactions to subject matter rather than on an examination of the text in a more inclusive sense.

Piety may appear to be a problem at first, but much of what is more accurately

Victorian "sentiment" reads today like piety. The innocent, Christian child, Marcus, for instance, who seems to be modelled on Dickens' Paul Dombey from *Dombey and Son* and who has much of the sentiment which is prominent in Dickens, is only partly an expression of Annapolis Valley piety. He is closer in many ways to the elevated Victorian ideal of family and childhood innocence. De Mille was aware of the distinction between "The Real" and "The Ideal" and also between "cant" (the language of piety) and the Ideal. He detested cant but portrays love and familial relations in the "Ideal" style, which he defines as follows:

*The Ideal* — Where the writer describes characters and scenes that are elevated beyond real life. The ideal must rise from the real. The writer takes striking circumstances, as in human life, and builds up an ideal world therefrom.<sup>14</sup>

As we tend to overlook sentimentality in Dickens, so we need to look beyond it in De Mille if we are to understand the narrative devices, irony and figurative language and the complex inversions of theological and dramatic emphasis through which De Mille conveys his quite unorthodox positions in *Helena's Household*.

It is also important to understand as much as possible about De Mille's beliefs and attitudes, and the study which follows can help enlighten some of the mystery of this strange writer. As Parks observes, we need to know more about De Mille and, "While the personality, convictions, and ideals of De Mille can be only partially understood at our present stage of knowledge, what is known or can reasonably be deduced is of the utmost importance"<sup>15</sup> to an understanding of his other works.

The power of conservative religious groups at the time should be recognized at the outset, and De Mille was in the middle of a sectarian battle about colleges at the time *Helena's Household* was published. In 1865 he moved from the Baptist Acadia College to the Presbyterian (though nominally provincial) Dalhousie College. The Anglicans already had Kings College. De Mille moved at the same time from the church of his father, the Baptist, to the Anglican Church into which he had been born. At least one Baptist historian was displeased and comments, "Professor James DeMill [sic], who was doing most excellent work in Acadia College, was induced, for reasons perfectly satisfactory no doubt to himself, to accept a chair in Dalhousie. This was in 1865."<sup>16</sup>

A quick look through the records of Acadia College shows that most of the teaching staff stayed only one or two years, and that De Mille's tenure from 1861-65 was fairly long. However, he had other connections with the college, having been a student and teacher. Two brothers had graduated from Acadia in 1849 and 1860 and his father was a member of the Board of Governors and "liberally aided her by large pecuniary donations."<sup>17</sup> His father-in-law had been the President of the College and earlier of Horton Academy where he went to school. Even if he had not had such close ties to the college, moves of the sort he made, in the political and religious climate of the time, were not made lightly.

Honour and religion were serious matters, as witness Joseph Howe's duel with pistols in Halifax's Point Pleasant Park over a question of honour in 1840.<sup>18</sup> De Mille had been at Acadia and knew the tremendous animosity and righteous zeal of the Baptist Convention on this matter of education. They had made education an election issue for many years, even causing Howe's defeat in 1843,<sup>19</sup> and continued with it, finally forcing a readjustment of grants in 1875.<sup>20</sup>

This was a world where doctrinal purity was examined carefully. Although the Baptists were actually the Reform Party of their day, they were theologically conservative and punished those who differed from the mainstream. The minutes of the Baptist Convention have numerous references to people like the pastor from Wilmot — the Convention “revoked his license to preach, and excluded him with thirteen others who adhere to him”<sup>21</sup> — or the church in Annapolis: “This church has been called to pass through a severe trial with reference to their once esteemed pastor, in having to exclude him from their communion and his pastoral relation to them.”<sup>22</sup> Even the British and Foreign Bible Society “have refused to aid in the circulation of those versions of the Scriptures in foreign languages which have been made by Baptist missionaries, solely because our brethren have faithfully translated the word Baptize by words which signify to immerse.”<sup>23</sup>

It was, then, a considerable step for De Mille to move from Acadia to Dalhousie and from the Baptist to the Anglican Church at a time when it was advisable for everyone to belong to some kind of religious power group. But it was even more of a threat to write the sorts of things he does in *Helena's Household*, which call into question many of the cherished beliefs of traditional Christianity. De Mille would be familiar from newspapers with the persecution of the relatively new Spiritualist movement in the eastern United States at the time,<sup>24</sup> and in *Lady of the Ice* he refers to the Mormons who were also being persecuted at about that time. He and his brother had found themselves in the middle of a vicious inter-Baptist feud when they ran an alternate Baptist newspaper in 1861.

It is likely his father's presence that kept him at Acadia: at the same meeting of the Baptist Convention (at Berwick, August 19-22, 1865) to which he sent his resignation, the Board of Governors also called upon the membership “to note the removal by death of one of their brethren, Nathan S. DeMill, Esq., of St. John.”<sup>25</sup> It may be that James did not want to hurt his father by the move, or that his father's death precipitated some of his own questions about religion.

In a passage from *The Cryptogram* we seem to get a reflection of the difficulties De Mille had in making his decision to leave Acadia College, when one of the characters explains:

“At length a crisis arrived. I had either to sacrifice my conscience or resign my position. I chose the latter alternative, and in doing so I gave up my political life forever. I need not tell the bitterness of my disappointment. But the loss of worldly prospects and of hope was as nothing compared with other things. The worst of all was the

reception which I met at home. My young, and as I supposed loving wife, to whom I went at once with my story, and from whom I expected the warmest sympathy, greeted me with nothing but tears and reproaches. She could only look upon my act with the world's eyes. She called it ridiculous Quixotism . . . [But] after all it was not so bad. I soon found employment . . . I could be more independent, though the prospects were poor."<sup>26</sup>

This is purely speculation, but the above passage seems to reflect some of the conflicts of conscience De Mille faced at the time *Helena's Household* was written, (it was published shortly after he moved to Dalhousie) and a move to Dalhousie College, which was just starting up after a long period of inactivity, would indeed have "poor prospects." Acadia was well established at the time, even having an Alumni Association since 1860.<sup>27</sup> The coldness and bitterness which Mrs. De Mille showed to MacMechan when he wanted to interview her for a possible biography<sup>28</sup> are also reflected in this passage from *The Cryptogram*.

The time of writing *Helena's Household* was not a pleasant time and the move to Dalhousie seems to have more to do with conscience than academic promotion. *Helena's Household* even suggests that De Mille was at odds not only with the Baptist church but with the main currents of western Christianity.

THE DRAMATIC MODE OF *Helena's Household* is not typical of most fiction, being mainly a form of dramatized theological discourse. The editor at Robert Carter & Bros. sensed rightly that the "theological thought" in the novel would be in some way unacceptable to his readers and that De Mille's historic reconstructions were being used as a means of unorthodox theological exploration. A further threat arose because the novel was perhaps even "true" historically, and this would imply that the historic sources of certain Christian doctrines made the beliefs themselves suspect. De Mille was combining theology and history in a fictional work to convey ideas by implication which would not be approved in a more direct form, as in an essay or speech.

De Mille also uses devices from religious literature. It is helpful, in trying to understand the form of *Helena*, to see the characters as allegorical, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The basic parable structure can be seen in the arrangement of setting and characters. Evil, represented by Nero's court, is in conflict with Good, represented by Helena's household. That parable would be fine for a conservative audience except that the "good" characters are not all Christian (let alone of one denominational leaning) and the Christians are not all "good." It is noteworthy that baptism is not mentioned in the novel, either by immersion or otherwise, and that De Mille is certainly not supporting a Baptist theology.

The parable thus implies that a non-Christian truth may be valid and, because

the Christian characters do not all find the truth they are seeking, the Christian answers may not always be valid. The parable from the outset introduces a number of questions which the conservative Christian of De Mille's day might well have felt threatening. It is interesting that in *Strange Manuscript*, written about this time, the inversion is carried even farther, so that in that novel it is impossible to define what is Good or Evil.

"Helena's Household" is at the centre of the parable and this core represents certain values. Cineas, Helena's brother, embodies Greek religion and culture; Labeo, her husband, is the epitome of Roman virtues and strength; and Helena seems to represent the sort of person who would become a Christian, one caught between traditions and seeking other solutions. Marcus (Helena's son), at least at the beginning of the novel, represents innocent, untested Christianity. Ironically, although he seems in some ways an ideal of childhood innocence, he uses the cant of Christian piety to which De Mille objected strongly in other contexts, and when his Christianity is tested, even for a short time, it quickly decays. Marcus is thus a sentimental character but certainly not a Christian ideal.

Connected to this household are others who are part of the religious mosaic of first century Roman society. Marcus' nurse is a slave and a Christian and represents the many lower class characters who people the novel anonymously as the Christian church. Another slave of Labeo's estate is Isaac, a learned Jew and the librarian and doctor on the estate. It is in conversations between Isaac and Cineas that we get a sense of the depth of De Mille's interest in Greek religion and in Judaism.

The British connection is also important and is in some ways related to De Mille's little book *The Early English Church*,<sup>29</sup> and helps to introduce certain aspects of Druid religion into the novel. De Mille was interested in Druid religion, and earlier versions of the novel may have made the connection clearer. Labeo spends much time in Britain with the Roman army, Marcus and Helena die there, and Galdus, a slave from Britain who becomes Marcus' fast friend, is from Britain. Galdus' speaks to Marcus like Caliban to Stephano in *The Tempest*, "'You are my God, and I worship you'" (193). Galdus contributes to the theological discussion by explaining his experiences with the cruelties of Druid rituals and gives us an insight into some of the darker potentials of religion.

The novel may draw on the parable and allegory for its structure, but this outline indicates that it is not a Christian parable. In fact, the non-Christian characters have the strong roles and the Christians seem to be distanced and to lack depth.

There are two centres of focus in the novel, then. Helena's household provides ties to the world of the Christians and their peculiar problems, because Helena, Marcus and the nurse are Christian. The other centre of action, Nero's court, where Labeo and Cineas are favorites, dramatizes the effects of absolute authority and absolute corruption and is the source of threat and destruction in the plot. The plot, however, is driven by historic forces rather than by the volition of the charac-

ters (including Nero who is a victim of history as much as of his own immorality), with the result that one has the sense that morality and religion have little effect on the outcome of life and the characters are caught in an inhuman progression of events: they may seek God or the gods, Christianity or the religions of Rome, but it is no easy matter for them to feel the influence of the Divine in the puzzle of history.

The plot and characters, then, suggest little that is pious, so that the summary and comments so far seem like they refer to a completely different novel than the one MacLeod refers to as "pietistic" and revealing nothing but De Mille's Baptist prejudices.<sup>30</sup> One approach to resolving the conflict of the piety of the language and the almost anti-Christian sentiments of the plot is to assume that the pietistic passages are not original material, but were put in later to satisfy the editor and disguise some quite heretical implications.

We know, for instance, that De Mille detested cant and false piety. A former student at Acadia College, Herbert Creed, even found it necessary to emphasize that "'While he was doubtless a sincere Christian'" still "'he took delight in ridiculing everything like cant, and even the ordinary words and actions of the 'pious' sort of people often brought to his keen eye and thin curling lip that peculiar sarcastic smile of his.'"<sup>31</sup> If one reads the pious passages of *Helena's Household* not as "Baptist prejudice" but as satirical, as piety parodying itself, they make more sense in relation to the rest of the text. De Mille's own sarcastic attitude to superficial piety makes it hard to imagine that he would include the pieties of Marcus and Helena (as a means of disguising the deeper implications of his argument?), without himself smiling sarcastically.

Seeing the piety as a later addition also accounts for another anomaly at the end of the novel. Cineas and Isaac are the most articulate characters in the novel and their discussions raise some serious questions about the formation of early Christianity and the interpretation of Scripture. Yet the Christians are given nothing of substance with which to argue against them. Christianity, at least in most of its forms, is even presented as a progressively negative or weakening influence. The major weight of the Christian argument at the end of the novel is finally left to Helena, and here the novel almost falls apart because her comments about Christianity are actually mere lists of Christian pieties, as if De Mille could not be bothered with a connected argument.

**I**F WE MOVE BEYOND PIETY and the assumption that De Mille must be conservative because he was raised a Baptist, to the more substantial debate which underlies De Mille's parable, we begin to enter into some very complex rhetorical structures.

Christianity in the novel is neither derived from nor invested in the Bible but is placed in history and is seen as a product of a response of human beings to historic circumstances. There is no "Scripture" or "Divine Word" here to proclaim absolute truth, and meaning fluctuates with circumstance, so that the Christians have to struggle to find what their religion really is about. It is the fluidity of the Roman version of the Christian religion which is important for De Mille's argument.

The "Scriptures," as far as they exist, are Jewish, and Isaac, Labeo's Jewish slave, knows more about them than do the Christians. The Christians draw from "Scripture" for their services, but they are described as, "the psalms of the Jews, which the Christians had also adopted, and to which they had given a new meaning" (271). The newness of the meanings they assign to the Scriptures is emphasized many times as we hear in Isaac's words the Jewish interpretation of Scripture and then hear it with a completely different meaning from the Christians. The linguist De Mille would especially sympathize with the learned Isaac's comment to Cineas, "But I need not say that to us, who know the original, the translation does not possess the same beauties" (33).

De Mille not only questions the authority of the translations of the Bible on which western churches are based, but, more profoundly, he questions biblical authority itself, the cornerstone of Protestant theology, by dramatizing the limitations of the people who wrote the texts. The Bible is thus the word of history, rather than the "Word of God."

In this vein St. Paul, the writer of most of the New Testament, is brought into the novel as a strong but distant and shadowy figure. With him is Luke, who wrote the "Gospel of St. Luke" and the "Book of the Acts of the Apostles," much of it about Paul. The major authors of the New Testament text are in the novel, then, and are trying to find their way in this new religion, like all the rest. A knowledgeable reader might begin to realize from this dramatization that the New Testament contains very little of the Jewish background from which "the Jewish Teacher" — Jesus — arose. The deep spirituality of Judaism, which the Greek Cineas recognizes as containing "All that he had ever heard of the mysterious knowledge of the Egyptians and Asiatics" (35) is lost to a more superficial view derived from Roman experience which is immersed in ignorance, suffering and grief.

Manuscripts are being passed among the Christians, but no one has a complete account of what the new religion is about. Helena and Cineas have a gospel for a while but have to return it to its owner (oddly, they do not think of having it copied). Helena is converted to Christianity as a result of reading the gospel, but Cineas feels the gospel is not sufficient: he needs to know more, but there are no other sources of information. Ignorance seems thus to be a pervasive aspect of the Roman church in the novel, and the religion which comes from the Roman experience, including most of Western Christianity, is shown to be subject to the historic distortion of Rome.



This is not an anti-Roman Catholic novel, however. It seeks to uncover roots which pre-date the founding of that church.

As in *The Cord and Creese* (1869) or *The Cryptogram* (1870), De Mille gives us in *Helena* a puzzle or cryptogram to read, but in this case it is a religious puzzle and the clues are in biblical and theological knowledge. Cineas and Helena, for instance, studied under the "Master," Theophilus, in Athens. His name means "lover of God," but is also the name of the person to whom Luke's "Gospel" and "Book of Acts" are addressed.<sup>32</sup> Most of De Mille's readers would recognize the name Theophilus and his connection with Luke. In the novel, then, it is implied that Luke, St. Paul's companion, is a friend or disciple of Theophilus, like Cineas and Helena.

De Mille makes a point of having Theophilus die without finding truth, even though it is implied that he has read Luke's accounts of Jesus' life and the history of the early Christians. The old Master dies, pleading, "O God, reveal thyself!" and Cineas comments, echoing King Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes (and perhaps also echoing De Mille), ". . . all life and all religion are full of perplexity. What can make it vanish? Never can it, till we arrive at that other life in which we all believe" (96). (The "other life" that is being referred to here, by the way, is not the Christian heaven, but the Greek other life according to the teachings of Socrates.)

The "Scriptures" of the Christians, then, are dramatized in their formative years, while they are being written by people in historic settings, before they have been collected together, codified and de-historicized. The implication, of course, is that "Scripture" is relative to the person doing the writing and the historic circumstance and is not dictated by God (as was held by many Christians of the nineteenth century.)<sup>33</sup>

**A**N EASY PIETY IS NOT POSSIBLE IN THIS NOVEL. Not only are the scriptural guides to Christian life inadequate but De Mille, through Cineas' words and actions, questions much of Christian doctrine. Cineas' name seems to come from the Greek "ΣΙΝΙΟΝ," a sieve. He is the confidante of almost all the characters, including Nero, and he, like the academic De Mille, sifts every idea, looking for truth. He is described as "an earnest inquirer after truth, and sought it under all forms. He had heard the Christian doctrine explained . . . and yet he found it not acceptable" (117). If this characterization applies to De Mille also, as it seems to in what follows here, then De Mille is rejecting much of Christian doctrine through Cineas, who carries the major weight of the novel's theological explorations.

Cineas' first problem, like Helena's, is the conflict between intellect and simple faith. Helena says she admires "the poor and illiterate man [who] takes his God to

himself, and prays to him, and is comforted while he prays" (20). Cineas feels the same way about his Christian friend, the centurion Julius:

He felt a kind of envy of his friend, and for a moment wished that he himself might have the same calm faith. For it was his nature to question all things; he struggled with doubt that rose behind every belief, and the habit of a lifetime of speculation could not readily be lost. (220)

The conflict here is not between pagan and Christian, but, as in many nineteenth century writers, between "calm faith" and the claims of intellect: behind every belief there is doubt. However, through Cineas' doubts De Mille can examine many of the fundamental questions facing Christianity in the nineteenth century, from literalism to the identity of Jesus himself.

Isaac is a literalist, and although Jewish, is representative of any religious literalism. Isaac explains to Cineas that Jewish Biblical prophecy will be fulfilled literally, in the destruction of nations and the killing of thousands of people in war and pestilence. In language that reflects the arguments of Christian literalists of De Mille's day, Isaac explains the horror of the "Last Days." Cineas is repelled by Isaac's descriptions of blood and a vengeful God.

To Cineas, raised on Socratic ideas of the purity of the divine, this "was to vulgarize the sublime conception of the Infinite Mind" (123). De Mille's own satiric smile at the "pious sort of people" of his day, can be seen when Cineas objects sneeringly,

"And is that all? Is that the end of your divine revelation? Why, beside that, Plato is indeed Divine. Socrates is a God beside such a Messiah. For your promised leader would only fill the earth with terrible wars and all mankind would be convulsed." (123)

Again, in language that almost sounds like the debate De Mille must have carried on before leaving the Baptist Church, Cineas pleads with the literalist Isaac: "Tell me that your prophecies of triumph are figurative. Tell me that his victory is over the soul, and then I will look for the Divine in your writings." But the literalist replies, almost cruelly, "No . . . impossible. They are literal, or nothing is true. Take away that literal truth, and all the hope of ages dies" (124).

Psychologically this debate is accurate. The literalist cannot let go of any part of his thought system without feeling threatened, and someone like Cineas (De Mille), who has received a wider education, cannot think in the narrow terms of the literalist. This is a conflict, not between two religions, but between ways of seeing the world and ways of reading texts. De Mille sides with Cineas here and we see in Isaac's fate the practical results of literalism.

Isaac assumes that God will send a literal, physical Messiah to defeat the Romans and become King in Jerusalem. Labeo frees him from slavery and he goes to Judea to be part of this literal victory. He is faced with defeat, suffering and tremendous

corruption among his fellow Jews and begins to question, " 'O God of Abraham . . . if thou canst allow this, then what is there that thou wilt not allow to be done?' " (406). But once doubt enters the literalist view, the whole structure begins to crumble.

Isaac dies just as Jerusalem is destroyed and the temple is burning and his death seems to be the inevitable end of one who believes any text literally:

For a few moments Isaac stood motionless. Then he walked forward and threw his sword into the flames.

Then he raised his clenched fist to the skies, and looking up, cried out, in a loud and piercing voice, —

" 'O God of Abraham! How hast thou mocked the people who trusted in thee!'"

The next instant he rushed forward, and sprang into the raging flames. (410)

Isaac's words here even echo Jesus on the cross — " 'My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me.' " <sup>34</sup> (One could almost conclude that De Mille thought Jesus, like Isaac, had taken the Jewish Scripture too literally in seeing himself as the messiah, and that he found out his mistake too late.)

Of course, if the accuracy of the text of the Bible is in some doubt, as is implied in the manuscripts and conditions of composition in the novel, literal interpretation of a corrupted text serves no purpose. An unreliable text cannot be interpreted literally. But De Mille's implied doubts go farther even than this.

The Christianity which develops in the novel (and it is changing and adapting constantly) is not some monolithic system of beliefs. The Christian characters are struggling and evolving, with very limited guidance, to derive a system of beliefs from their teachers and fellows. The Roman Christians, limited and distorted by isolation and suffering and with no direct contact with Jesus and only limited contact with St. Paul, are presented as the makers of Christianity and of the Bible. But De Mille is even more specific in presenting the source of the peculiar distortion he sees in Christianity: it is not Jesus or his teachings that are to blame, nor even St. Paul, but the catacombs.

Before Nero drives the Christians into hiding in the catacombs there is a sense of optimism. Helena and Marcus especially are full of light and love and the Christian message has a ring of hope about it, as if God does indeed love the world. The strength of Christianity is embodied in St. Paul as seen through the eyes of Julius (the centurion who accompanied Paul on his journeys):

"But he had something more than mere courage . . . he had that spiritual power to sustain him, which made him superior to other men. By that supernatural influence, he was enabled to foretell our deliverance, to save himself from the most venomous of reptiles, and to heal the sick by his touch." (76)

This "supernatural" strength in Paul is not shared by any of the other Christian characters in the novel and so does not protect them from the experience of persecution and the catacombs which changes them radically and which, it is implied,

put an indelible stamp on subsequent Christian belief. In this reading of history the catacombs may have more to do with Christianity than Christ.

De Mille was fascinated by the catacombs. He had visited them while in Rome, and they had a profound influence on his imagination. He lectured on them and talked about them<sup>35</sup> and his first novel, *The Martyr of the Catacombs*, is mainly about life underground. They are a place of adventure for his Young Dodge Club in *The Seven Hills* (1872). The cave dwelling Kosekin in *Strange Manuscript* may be an imaginative extension of Christians who never got out of this "vast Christian Necropolis" where "the Christians found a place for their dead" (213).

The catacombs in *Helena's Household* are described almost as Adam More describes the place of the dead in *Strange Manuscript*. Cineas and the family enter the darkness for the funeral of Marcus' nurse:

It was a wild, weird scene. The passage was about seven feet high, and not more than four feet wide. The walls, on either side, were rough, and bore the marks of excavating tools. The torches served to illumine the scene but faintly. The darkness that opened before them was intense. (214)

As long as this place is merely a cemetery, the Christians have a sense of hope, but Nero institutes a horrible persecution of Christians and they are driven permanently underground. There, in the darkness, children, women and men sicken and die. Even Julius, the centurion, becomes despondent and the whole religion turns to a form of life-in-death. The Christians who escaped execution

seemed far better than those who had perished on the cross or by fire. At first it seemed so; but as time passed, and the gloom deepened around them, this living burial seemed worse than death. (267)

Now, even the teachings of the gospel give only "momentary relief . . . [because] these feelings were only transitory; no joy or content could endure in so frightful a place; the gloom affected the physical constitution, and thus acted upon the mind also" (267).

De Mille seems to be implying that out of the catacomb experience comes the denial of the world and the hope for death (like the Kosekin, again) which is characteristic of many branches of nineteenth century Christianity, the sense that "They lost all hope in this life, and looked eagerly to the next one" (268).

George Woodcock, writing of *Strange Manuscript*, makes a connection between Christianity and the death wish, but sees it as coming from the Old Testament rather than the catacombs:

To those who considered themselves enlightened and rational, as De Mille undoubtedly did, much of the Old Testament-oriented religion of their age seemed motivated by . . . a turning away from light into a longed-for darkness.<sup>36</sup>

In *Helena* the catacombs, not the Old Testament, have this effect.

Even Marcus, who was the centre of faith and pious sentiments early in the novel, and who fled to the catacombs for only three days, falls under "a profound melancholy." There is no resurrection for him after three days in the tomb, except the resurrection to a living death:

That life under ground had a double horror; it was in darkness, and it was among the dead. It was the valley of the shadow of death! Alas! that shadow had passed over their souls. (314)

It is significant that the two pillars of piety, Helena and Marcus, never overcome the effects of this shadow and gradually weaken and die. It is as if De Mille is suggesting that their religious faith did not have any deep roots or power and that they are really no different from the pagan husband Labeo of whom De Mille writes, "the very blackness of darkness gathered around Labeo, and his soul was filled with desolation" (332).

So, in this novel, pious sentiments or beliefs mean nothing in the face of the darkness of life. The literalist Isaac and the pious Helena both end in despair.

The problems and conflicts which De Mille raises are not raised just to shock his pious readers — there is a strong sense of the novel being a vehicle of searching as well as of criticism. Cineas seems to reflect De Mille's own retraction when he says,

"Believe me, I am not one who brings up a score of petty objections to a pure and elevated religion for an idle purpose. I am distressed. I am perplexed. I wish that this Christianity of yours could be made acceptable to me. But it cannot be. (224)

The novel was not conceived by De Mille as petty, and it is not even satiric (except where piety parodies itself). It is rather De Mille's way of dealing with distress and perplexity.

**D**E MILLE HAD TROUBLE finding satisfactory endings for his serious novels, either because he did not wish to follow through the implications of his vision or because he was forced to change the endings in order to publish. But although *Helena*, like *Strange Manuscript*, does not seem to end adequately, it is still possible to see something of the synthesis of religion toward which he was struggling. He was not anti-religious by any means, but he does not seem to have believed in many of the church's doctrines and in Christianity's exclusive claim to truth and God's ear. Again, Cineas is central to the resolution of conflicting forces.

The primary conflict seems at first to be between intellect and faith, with faith as something to be envied but also as a subtle form of ignorance. Thus Cineas envies Helena, as Helena had earlier envied the poor peasant, because "She had . . . gained . . . firm faith, sure faith, absolute knowledge of God and love for him. And he wished that he could be like her" (179). His problem is that "His keen, subtle, and speculative mind led him to scrutinize everything carefully and ask — why?" (179)

Ironically, Isaac, the Jew, also says, like Helena, “‘My faith in Him cannot be shaken by any conceivable thing’ ” (377).

This kind of faith might be called “blind faith” or “unthinking faith” or even “literal faith” but the opposite of this kind of faith is despair and both fall into despair: Helena after the catacomb experience and Isaac after the fall of Jerusalem. Cineas, the intellectual, Platonic sifter, does not expect “literal” meaning, and so does not fall into despair.

Besides pointing out the “literalist” qualities of what is commonly called “faith,” and the tendency of the faithful to fall into despair, there are other doctrines with which De Mille has problems, especially the idea of sin.

The first time we encounter the Christian idea of “sin” is in a scene where a Christian Roman Centurion, Eubulus, is protecting his daughter from attempted gang rape. Julius and Cineas help him and then find that the Christian soldier is consumed with guilt for shedding blood during the incident. Julius objects that “‘A religion which teaches this [idea of sin] cannot come from God.’ ” And Cineas cannot believe that Eubulus thinks God must forgive his action: “‘Forgive! . . . Is that the word? — forgive! He will approve of it’ ” (173). Again, some of De Mille’s distaste for subservient piety and guilt can be seen in Cineas, who, as a Seeker, says, “‘but if in you, a Christian, I find such sentiments as these, what can I think? Will I not be forced to think that it is all baseness, and poverty of spirit, and abject meanness?’ ” (173-4).

Further, this problem of sin seems to be more than just the conflict of heroic action and grovelling. In one of the longest and most passionate speeches of the book, Cineas argues the ideas of sin, eternal punishment and the necessity for sacrifice as redemption. In these lines, which I quote at length, we can get a sense of De Mille’s own passionate objections to the ideas of his contemporaries:

“To me it is simply inconceivable that God, under any circumstances, should suffer death.”

To this Julius answered, that Christ died to atone for sin. All men are sinners, and subject to the wrath of God. Unless they can obtain pardon, they must suffer forever.

To this doctrine Cineas expressed the strongest repugnance.

“I acknowledge,” said he, “that there is much sin in the world, but a large number of men are simple, good-hearted folk, and to say that they are under God’s wrath, and liable to eternal punishment, seems so shocking that I do not think it deserves discussion.

“To *pardon sin*, you say. What sin? I deny that all men are sinners. I know many good, wise, and holy men, who have done nothing to merit any future punishment, and who, in fact should receive in the future nothing but blessedness. For myself, I do not see what I have done that needed such suffering on my behalf. You will say that he died for me. Why should he die for me? What punishment have I deserved that he should take it upon himself and suffer in my place?

“I, from my earliest youth, have tried to seek after truth, and God. Is this sin? I have given myself up to this lifelong pursuit. Have I incurred God’s wrath, — the

wrath of One whom my soul craves to know and seeks to love? . . . I have always endeavored to live a pure life, and will you tell me that eternal punishment lies before me? For what? What have I ever done? Can you believe this, and yet affirm that God is just?" (222-3)

This passage may be in the mouth of a Greek character, but the phrases which Julius uses, "Christ died to atone for sin," "All men are sinners and subject to the wrath of God," or Christ "died for me" are the language of the Baptist and Anglican churches to which De Mille belonged.

Here De Mille questions the whole sin/wrath/sacrifice/redemption doctrine which has been at the centre of Christianity since the days of Augustine. Elsewhere in the novel De Mille even associates the human sacrifice of the cross with Druid human sacrifice and the Wrath of God with the cruel god Galdus had known in Britain. The Biblical injunction to "Fear the Lord," is turned on its head in this scene when Galdus says, almost flippantly, "Yes, all that I ever heard about one God, or many gods, makes me fear one and all . . . Those who know him best, fear him most'" (191).

It is against this dark, bloodthirsty, vengeful aspect of Christianity that De Mille seems to be directing the full force of his rhetoric. De Mille builds up examples of human sacrifice from different cultures: the human sacrifice which Galdus has experienced, where " 'I have seen my own brother laid on a stone, and the priest plunge his sharp knife in his throat,' " (192) [shades of Kosekin]; the human sacrifice of the cross; the Prometheus of Aeschylus, punished as "Thee, victim doomed," (150) because he loved mankind; even the "mysterious repast" of blood and flesh (260) pile up as evidence for Cineas' argument that religion has distorted some form of original truth or spirituality. Christianity turns to human sacrifice and is no better here than the Druids (or the Kosekin) except that its cannibalism is symbolic.

De Mille elsewhere quotes Coleridge admiringly in his support of,

The intelligible forms of ancient poets,  
The fair humanities of old religion,  
The power, the beauty and the majesty.<sup>37</sup>

In De Mille's reading of history the "fair humanities" seem to have been lost from Christianity and the same cruelty found in "pagan" religion has taken their place.

Much of Western Christianity has emphasized sin as basic to human experience and De Mille, both in the Baptist and Anglican churches, would have learned that idea quite consistently. One wonders where his rebellion comes from or what philosophical position he is aligning himself with in these objections. A clue to this mystery is in a cryptic reference in his odd little book, *The Early English Church*. In a general discussion of the history of the church he says,

In the beginning of the fifth century a British Christian, Pelagius, disturbed the

world with doctrines *esteemed* heretical; and St. Germanus was sent over from Gaul to preach against them. [*italics mine*]<sup>88</sup>

De Mille is here resurrecting an ancient debate between St. Augustine and Pelagius, a British monk of the fourth century, and in *Helena* he presents the same discussion dramatically.

Pelagius argued that humans are not completely depraved (as formulated by St. Augustine in his doctrine of original sin and upheld by most churches since), but that although we are inclined to sin, we have the innate capacity (not dependent on redemptive action from outside ourselves) to choose the good.

Pelagius' argument is based on the injunction in Matthew 5:48 to the effect that we should strive to be perfect like God. If we look at Cineas' argument against the idea of human depravity (quoted at length earlier), we find he argues that he has been trying to perfect himself to be like God. Cineas is, then, acting on the Pelagian attitude which the church has "esteemed heretical."

The Pelagian hero is very different than the martyr hero of the catacombs. For Cineas the heroes of truth are those who have struggled for perfection, instead of merely enduring suffering. However, in following the Pelagian ideas about heroism in this part of the novel, De Mille brings into question another cherished Christian doctrine having to do with Christ's divinity.

Jesus is compared closely in the novel with Prometheus, Socrates and Plato and De Mille seems to suggest that if Jesus is a divine messenger, he is one of several. The similarities between Prometheus and Jesus are not as close as between Socrates and Jesus, but they give Cineas room to ponder. Jesus' death reminds him of Prometheus' death: " 'Yes, there was a repetition of all that Aeschylus has presented to us — a Being who loves men, who does good to them, who suffers for them, who endures the mysterious anger of the Supreme' " (150). He finds other similarities: the scorn of those watching the death and the earthquake as evidence that "nature sympathizes" (151). He then sees how Socrates, when he was put to death, forgave his enemies, just like Jesus. This, he says, " 'is the crowning glory of his [Socrates'] sublime life' " (152).

All these similarities suggest to Cineas that Jesus " 'is another Socrates, formed under different circumstances, and, perhaps, more favorable ones' " (153). Then Cineas analyses Socrates' and Jesus' cultural influences and arrives at a combined social/evolutionary/divine account of their historic roles.

Socrates is an appropriate messenger to the Greeks. He is "lively, fond of banter, quick at retort, and had that indirect way of making assertions, which is a characteristic of the people to which he belonged" (153). Jesus, on the other hand, " 'came fresh from a solemn, silent people, full of veneration, possessed of sublime ideas of God, and convinced of his love for them. He was a true child of such a people' " (154).

These teachers are in part produced by their societies, but also " 'Socrates



plainly stated that he was sent by God, as did the Jewish teacher, but he never pretended to perform miracles.' ” Cineas accounts for Socrates’ lack of supernatural powers, except for his guiding spirit, “his *dæmon*,” by saying half-humorously, “ ‘But, perhaps, among the sceptical Athenians it was better not to have the power of performing miracles. It might have put an end to his career at an early period’ ” (154). The teachers may be appropriate to their societies, but the humour suggests that they were both “sent by God.”

THE NOVEL SKILLFULLY PRESENTS A CASE for “divine relativity.” The novel removes the reader to an historic distance from the beginnings of Christianity; presents the mix of religious discussion and practice in the first century; presents each cultural group with its own messiah or teacher; and then concludes that “ ‘I cannot help believing that this wonderful man [Jesus] was a divine messenger sent by God to *that* people to teach *them*’ ” [italics mine] (148). God is still presented as being active in these teachers, but Jesus no longer has the status of the “Only Son of God.”

If we follow through implications further we find that what Jesus taught the first century Jews, and what was filtered through the consciousness of the Roman Christians were not the same thing and may not be entirely appropriate to the present. It may not, in fact, be possible to determine what the real “historical Jesus” was like, a task the German theologians of De Mille’s day were struggling to accomplish, without success.

It is not much wonder that the first editor wanted De Mille’s novel to be changed in some way before presenting it to a religiously conservative public. De Mille leaves almost none of the central Christian doctrines unquestioned.

If the major Christian ideas of the infallibility of Scripture, the necessity for faith in a just or loving Deity, the sinfulness of man and the redemptive action of the crucifixion, along with the divinity of Christ are to be discarded or at least questioned, one wonders what De Mille has left of the teachings of his youth.

Again, Cineas seems to speak the alternative. He wishes first to avoid literal interpretation of texts because “In a spiritual interpretation he saw the truest and sublimest philosophy” (180). De Mille seems to have in mind here the sort of interpretation Emanuel Swedenborg practiced with Scripture. De Mille had read Swedenborg in university<sup>39</sup> and it is possible that studying at Brown University in the 1850’s he had some contact with the Swedenborg Foundation that was established in New York in 1849 to distribute books and ideas. Swedenborgian criticism tends to seek correspondences between the rhetorical structures of the text and the spiritual condition of the human being. Thus Cineas, objecting to Isaac’s literalism, seems to speak as a Swedenborgian would:

“Cannot your Messiah . . . of whom you speak so much, be, after all, as I have suggested before, a holy Prophet — a Teacher — one who will try to make your people purer in heart, and better in life? This I think would be an act more worthy of God, than to send a king or a general who would only shed the blood of men.” (181)

This would be a “spiritual interpretation” of Scripture in a Swedenborgian sense, because it interprets the text as applying to spiritual transformation and not to literal, historical conquest. In this paradigm “faith” is not dependent on “good” things happening externally or literally, but is directed toward personal understanding, knowledge and evolution, as in the Pelagian sense.

Applied to the person of Jesus, a “spiritual interpretation” does not concern itself with whether he is the “only” Son of God or if he was a sacrifice on the cross or even if the text is literally true. Jesus becomes “a Teacher — one who will try to make your people purer in heart, and better in life.” But a “spiritual interpretation” can accept that same Pelagian aim of human perfection through moral action in any other divine teacher, like Socrates or Plato or Prometheus. The “messiah” is, figuratively, the divine coming into the human world to help human beings, whatever form that messiah may take.

This interpretation of the role of the Messiah as Teacher also accounts for Cineas’ role at the end of the novel — he returns to Athens as a Christian teacher, but one has the sense that he will not enter the literalist’s trap of sin and guilt and despair. Even with the changes De Mille has had to make in the novel to avoid the censors, Cineas can still be seen as another Pelagian messiah, and that role is open to anyone who seeks truth.

If the above reading of *Helena’s Household* is at all valid, James De Mille’s characters are saying things about Christianity which were revolutionary, heretical, certainly out of step with most of the churches of his day. He has defused those comments to an extent, with pious passages, as required by his editor, but enough of the original remains to suggest the range and depth of his questioning and the struggle and perplexity he went through to arrive at solutions to his questions.

The novel is not purely an attempt to recreate Roman life, as in some other books at about the same time: many of the conflicts represented by De Mille’s characters were things De Mille was struggling with, so that even though Cineas is a convincing Greek intellectual, he is also De Mille arguing with the Baptists and Anglicans of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and even though Isaac is a convincing first century Jew, he also argues like the pious literalists who were the bane of De Mille’s life.

The novel does not try to set up an alternative orthodoxy. In fact, De Mille seems to be objecting to the literalist stance which codifies and claims to solve spiritual mysteries, and this refusal to define the “right” stance may help clarify some of the problems critics have had with the relativity of values in *Strange Manuscript*. He does, however, argue against the Roman, Augustinian ideas of sin and God’s wrath

which, through Calvin and many branches of Protestantism, made much of nineteenth century Christianity harsh and repressive. He argues for the Pelagian optimism of perfectibility.

For the Pelagian Cineas and for De Mille the pursuit of "truth" becomes a life-long endeavour to keep doubt and understanding in a creative balance, to maintain a constant stance of moral and spiritual relativity. De Mille outlines this relativity in triple echo, as if to emphasize it more. Cineas defends himself in a passage which is a fitting defense of De Mille's early artistic aims and which echoes Martin Luther's famous "Here I stand" defense against heresy:

"I will stand where I am, and in my doubt will still pray to Him, as if, as I have always believed, he indeed hears prayers, then surely he will at some time hear mine . . . if not in this life, yet perhaps in the next." (224)

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> M. G. Parks, "Editor's Introduction," in James De Mille, *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, (Oshawa, Ont.: Carleton Univ. Press, 1986), xxix. (One should also recognize that in the 19th century, the Baptists were the members of various Reform Parties, publically arguing against privilege and for universal education and opportunity. They were, in many ways, the radicals.)
- <sup>2</sup> Janice Kulyk Keefer. *Under Eastern Eyes: a critical reading of Maritime fiction*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1987, x.
- <sup>3</sup> James De Mille, *Helena's Household: a tale of Rome in the first century* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1867). (Page references following quotations in the text are from this edition.)
- <sup>4</sup> L. J. Burpee, "James De Mille," *Nation* (N.Y.), 83:138 (Aug. 16, 1906), quoted in R. E. Watters, "Introduction," to James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), x.
- <sup>5</sup> James De Mille, *Martyr of the Catacombs: A tale of ancient Rome*, (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865). Information about this novel has been scant, usually appearing in bibliographies as being published in "(1858?)." M. G. Parks lists *Helena's Household* as "De Mille's first published book," in 1867 and quotes A. H. De Mill's remark that 1866 was "long before he began to write." ("Strange to Strangers Only," *Canadian Literature* 70 (Autumn 1976), 63.) There is still considerable misunderstanding about when and what De Mille published. *Martyr* is not included in the CIHM microfiche collection of 19th century Canadiana. There is a copy of the book in the University of Detroit Library.
- <sup>6</sup> Burpee, x.
- <sup>7</sup> Parks, "Editor's Introduction," xxv.
- <sup>8</sup> James De Mille, *The Elements of Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1878), 275.
- <sup>9</sup> M. G. Parks, "Strange to Strangers Only," *Canadian Literature* 70 (1976), 69.
- <sup>10</sup> Carole Gerson, "Three Writers of Victorian Canada," in *Canadian Writers and Their Works: Fiction series, Vol. 1*, eds., Lecker, David, Quigly (Downsview, Ont.: ECW Press, 1983), 201.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

- <sup>12</sup> Douglas E. MacLeod, *A Critical Biography of James De Mille* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1968), 47.
- <sup>13</sup> Burpee, quoted in Parks, "Editor's Introduction," xlv.
- <sup>14</sup> *Rhetoric*, 306.
- <sup>15</sup> Parks, "Strangers Only," 76.
- <sup>16</sup> I. E. Bill, *Fifty Years with the Baptist Ministers and Churches of the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (St. John, N.B.: Barnes, 1880), 117. (In 1939, after time had allowed the issue to cool, Longley is more charitable, in that he suggests De Mille's move was "due to a new effort of the Government at Halifax to establish a provincial university." His father-in-law, Dr. Pryor (to whom *Helena's Household* is dedicated), had turned down the Dalhousie position before James was offered it. (R. S. Longley, *Acadia University, 1838-1938*, (Kentville, N.S.: Kentville Publishing, 1939), 77.)
- <sup>17</sup> Bill, 430.
- <sup>18</sup> George Patterson, *More Studies in Nova Scotian History* (Halifax: Imperial Publishing, 1941), 85.
- <sup>19</sup> Longley, 58.
- <sup>20</sup> Bill, 118.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. There are many examples of this kind of action in the minutes of the churches, without specific explanations, except that most seem to be on doctrinal grounds. Although Acadia did not require a statement of faith from its faculty members, there was considerable pressure from the Convention to assure that the students taught there would be able to carry on the Baptist traditions.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.
- <sup>24</sup> Dunbar Moodie kept a spiritualism diary of about 250 pages and Catherine and Susanna acted as mediums. Spiritualism was popular even among the clergy in Europe and North America except that their activities were usually kept secret because of the prevailing prejudice. See Michael Peterman, "In Search of Agnes Strickland's Sisters," *Canadian Literature* 121 (Summer, 1989), 121.
- <sup>25</sup> Bill, 430.
- <sup>26</sup> James De Mille, *The Cryptogram* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1870), 9.
- <sup>27</sup> Bill, 399.
- <sup>28</sup> Parks, "Editor's Introduction," xxi.
- <sup>29</sup> James De Mille, *The Early English Church* (Halifax, 1877).
- <sup>30</sup> MacLeod, 47.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in A. R. Bevan, "James De Mille and Archibald MacMechan," *Dalhousie Review*, XXXV, 3 (Autumn 1955), 205.
- <sup>32</sup> Luke 1:1 and Acts 1:1-2.
- <sup>33</sup> De Mille is here doing something similar with Christian doctrine as the contemporary German theologians were doing with the Scriptures: trying to sift through to find the "historic Jesus." De Mille implies that the Biblical text is too far removed from the original events to achieve a sense of what the "Jewish teacher" was actually like, and seems to see Christianity as a largely Greek and Roman creation. There is a different stream of Christianity, the "British church" of *The Early English Church*,

but that De Mille feels has been destroyed also by the Roman church coming into England to suppress the Pelagian “heresy.”

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 27:46 KJV.

<sup>35</sup> Bevan, 205.

<sup>36</sup> George Woodcock, “De Mille and the Utopian Vision,” in *The Canadian Novel: Beginnings*, Vol. II, ed. John Moss, (Toronto: NC Press, 1980), 109.

<sup>37</sup> De Mille, *Rhetoric*, 275.

<sup>38</sup> *English Church*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> MacLeod, 26.

## INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

*Cornelia C. Hornosty*

In the movie, they use pods to make the switch. Very clever — a greenhouse is hidden on a ship in the harbor. Special flowers begin turning up in every home and office. Something invades, eventually makes away with the whole town. Somehow the people just aren't the same as they were before. At first, this alarms and distresses. Wives scream and are hushed up. A few people resist for awhile, hide for a time. Later, everyone finds it so easy: you just fall asleep and it is achieved. What was the problem? In this film, it is not clear whether anyone dies or is reborn, what is destroyed, what is renewed, who is awake, who is asleep. It is not clear who the enemy really is. It is not clear why we keep remaking the story and watching it dozens of times. We revel in its sounds of alarm, but we forget to feel afraid. And we nod off.

