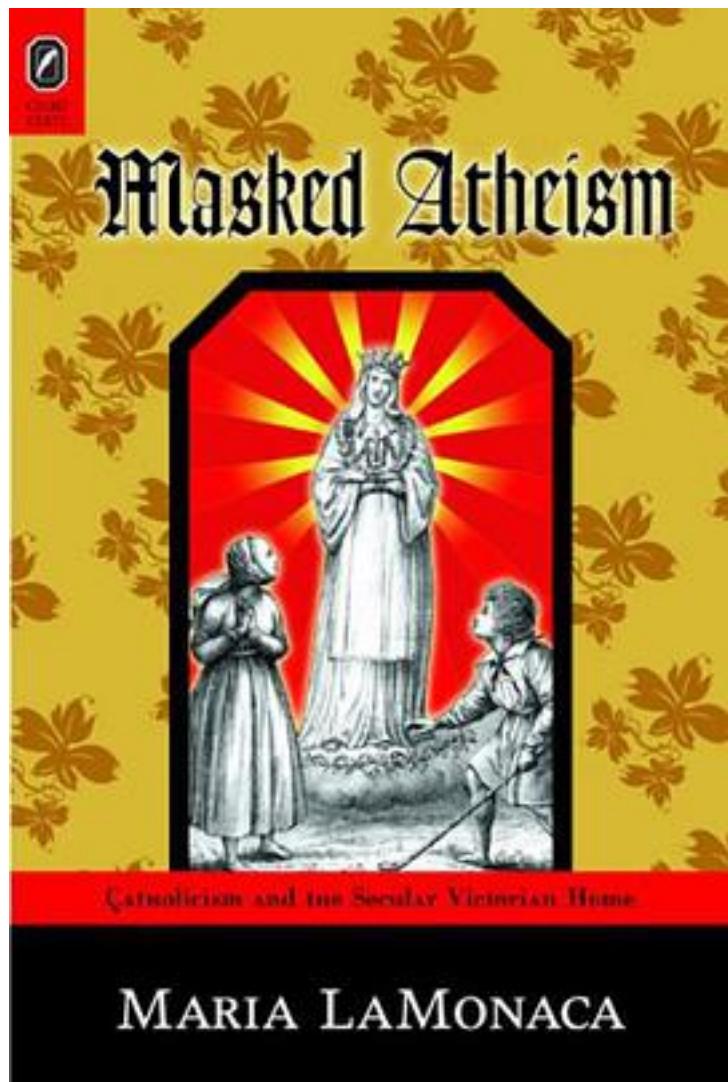


Masked Atheism



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Why did the Victorians hate and fear Roman Catholics so much? This question has long preoccupied literary and cultural scholars alike. *Masked Atheism: Catholicism and the Secular Victorian Home* by Maria LaMonaca begins with the assumption that anti-Catholicism reveals far more about the Victorians than simple theological disagreements or religious prejudice. An analysis of anti-Catholicism exposes a host of anxieties, contradictions, and controversies dividing Great Britain, the world's most powerful nation by the mid-nineteenth century. Noting that Catholicism was frequently caricatured by the Victorians as "masked atheism"--that is, heathenism and paganism masquerading as legitimate Christianity--LaMonaca's study suggests that much anti-Catholic rhetoric in Victorian England was fueled by fears of encroaching secularism and anxieties about the disappearance of God in the modern world. For both male and female writers, Catholicism became a synonym for larger, "ungodly" forces threatening traditional ways of life: industrialization, rising standards of living, and religious skepticism. LaMonaca situates texts by Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Michael Field, and others against a rich background of discourses about the growing visibility of Anglo and Roman Catholicism in Victorian England. In so doing, she demonstrates the influence of both pro- and anti-Catholic sentiment on constructs of Victorian domesticity, and explores how writers appropriated elements of Catholicism to voice anxieties about the growing secularization of the domestic sphere: a bold challenge to sentimental notions of the home as a "sacred" space. "Masked Atheism" will contribute a fresh perspective to an ongoing conversation about the significance of Catholicism in Victorian literature and culture.

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