

4-1-2019

Ruined Ingénue and Redeemed Sister: Representations of the Sex Worker in Late- Nineteenth-Century American Fiction

Helen Stec

University of Connecticut

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stec, Helen (2019) "Ruined Ingénue and Redeemed Sister: Representations of the Sex Worker in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Fiction," *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

DOI: 10.20429/aujh.2019.090104

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh/vol9/iss1/4>

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

**Ruined Ingénue and Redeemed Sister:
Representations of the Sex Worker in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Fiction**

Helen Stec

University of Connecticut

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the impoverished and vulnerable white sex worker was a ubiquitous figure in American fiction. Often portrayed as seduced and betrayed, this young woman could come from a lower-, working-, middle-, or upper-class background and almost always lived in an urban area. However, she also may have been a foreign-born naïf or innocent farm girl who only recently arrived in a bustling American city where she was easy prey for immoral men. The prostitute's most consistent characteristic in these stories, however, was her whiteness, which was strongly associated with notions of chastity, purity, and domesticity—ideals the prostitute directly violated with her immoral and overtly sexual behavior.¹

Male-authored novels written in the mid-to-late nineteenth century frequently denied female sexual desire and agency and adhered to themes of poverty and seduction. Karen J. Renner argues that the “prostitute became an object of antebellum fascination and concern less because of her defiance of the ideology of passionlessness and more because of the extent to

¹ For background information about nineteenth-century sex work, see Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 24-27; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 27-36; Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 139-140; Mary Ryan, *Womanhood in America, from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 85-135; Amy Gilman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1-12; Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 21-29.

which she could be made to reinforce this ideology,” for relegating the prostitute to the role of seduction victim reinforced existing beliefs about female desire’s dependency on male stimulus.² Often, male authors explicitly punished their female characters for their sexual indiscretions, typically by imposing death sentences upon them and by emphasizing how surviving sex workers were spiritually irredeemable. Thus, the underlying message of these novels was that loss of female purity could not be forgiven and respectable women could rarely survive outside this framework of female chastity, no matter how repentant or how victimized they may have been. However, the few female-authored novels from this time that address prostitution—though often as a secondary plot—appear to have been less encumbered by this patriarchal framework and more aware of the nuances of the female sexual experience. Thus, female authors were generally more forgiving and sympathetic to the sex workers they wrote about. They often allowed these women to achieve actual redemption in their novels and frequently condemned the callousness of middle- and upper-class society regarding the struggles many “fallen” women went through, especially those who came from poor and working-class backgrounds and had already engaged in a life-long struggle to support themselves and their families.

In *Quaker City; or, the Monks of Monk Hall* (1845), author George Lippard details the exploits of upper-class men as they patronize “Monk Hall,” a private gentlemen's club in Philadelphia that also functions as a brothel and opium den. Throughout the novel, these supposed “gentlemen” repeatedly and knowingly violate the social pillars of morality and respectability that they were supposed to uphold as members of the upper class. For example, while visiting Monk Hall, they gleefully engage in various modes of vice, including the solicitation of prostitutes and the seduction and abandonment of inexperienced young women for

² Karen J. Renner, “Seduction, Prostitution, and the Control of Female Desire in Popular Antebellum Fiction,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65, no. 2 (2010): 167.

sport. Lippard's characterization of seduction victims in *Quaker City* adheres closely to, and even relishes, mid-nineteenth-century America's favored "fallen woman" narrative; such a tale lent itself perfectly to Lippard's goal of writing a sensationalistic novel that would scandalize and shock America's "respectable" middle and upper classes. Lippard was acutely aware of the terror and outrage that would be provoked by a tale about rich men robbing innocent young girls of their virtue simply for their own amusement. In the novel's preface, Lippard speaks directly to the reader and asserts this idea:

I was the only Protector of an Orphan Sister. I was fearful that I might be taken away by death, leaving her alone in the world. I knew too well that law of society which makes a virtue of the dishonor of a poor girl, while it justly holds the seduction of a rich man's child as an infamous crime. These thoughts impressed me deeply. I determined to write a book, founded upon the following idea:

*That the seduction of a poor and innocent girl, is a deed altogether as criminal as deliberate murder. It is worse than the murder of the body, for it is the assassination of the soul; If the murderer deserves death by the gallows, then the assassin of chastity and maidenhood is worthy of death by the hands of any man, and in any place.*³

In Lippard's eyes, even if the violated young woman held no personal responsibility for her seduction, her soul was irreparably damaged—obliterated, even—and contemporary understandings of morality demanded that she not go unpunished for such a violation of nature. Though Mary Arlington, a virtuous middle-class girl who is tricked into a sham marriage and raped by a wealthy rake named Gustavus Lorrimer, does not physically die in *Quaker City*, Lippard makes it clear that her soul does. Once Mary realizes her marriage is fake, she shrieks that she is "forever fallen!" and asserts that her loss of purity has resulted in the loss of her identity as a respectable young woman. She tells her parents that she does not even identify as Mary Arlington anymore, but as "the polluted thing who was once [their] daughter!"⁴ Once the

³ George Lippard, *Quaker City; or, the Monks of Monk Hall* (Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart & Company, 1876), 1.

⁴ Lippard, *Quaker City*, 465.

Arlingtons realize that Lorrimer will never marry their fallen daughter and redeem her “sins,” Mary suffers a mental and emotional breakdown, for she knows that her fate as “a disowned and dishonored thing” is sealed, and she drops to the ground in a dead faint “lay[ing] insensible at her Seducer’s feet.”⁵

Mary’s parents also break down once they realize that their daughter has been irretrievably robbed of her virtue, with Mrs. Arlington woefully exclaiming that Mary has been “dishonored!” and Mr. Arlington pleading that Lorrimer marry his daughter to “[s]ave her from public shame.”⁶ Following this episode, Mary’s brother, Byrnewood, will not rest until he murders Lorrimer “[i]n the name of Mary Arlington.”⁷ Lippard demonstrates more empathy for his fallen woman than most other nineteenth-century male authors by punishing the seducer with death rather than the victim. However, Mary does not escape punishment, and Lippard makes it clear that Mary can never assimilate back into respectable society once she has become unchaste. Mary’s future has been ruined and, according to Lippard, she will never again be the pure and honorable girl she once was. She has been punished for her loss of virginity by the “pollution” of her soul.

George Thompson’s *Venus in Boston* (1849) plays on fears very similar to those evoked by Lippard in *Quaker City* and further illustrates how the deliverance of victims of sexual violence and exploitation is only assured if they manage to escape with their virginity intact. In *Venus*, a devious upper-class “gentleman” named Timothy Tickels targets Fanny Aubrey, a pure and chaste working-class woman. Tickels imprisons Fanny in his home, and she is cruelly beaten by his black servant when she refuses to give in to Tickels’ advances. Though Fanny eventually

⁵ Lippard, *Quaker City*, 407.

⁶ Lippard, *Quaker City*, 467-468.

⁷ Lippard, *Quaker City*, 487.

escapes, she is kidnapped again and imprisoned in a place where girls are trained to become prostitutes. However, she is rescued from this den of depravity before any man has a chance to “accomplish the ruin of a poor orphan girl.”⁸

According to Karen J. Renner, Thompson rewards his most passive and sexless female characters, for they reinforce the favored nineteenth-century ideology of female passionlessness and female libidos’ dependence on male stimulus. Fanny’s salvation lies in her staunch faith in God which “demands [her] complete submission.”⁹ When Fanny, for example, is kidnapped, she accepts God’s will and passively “pray[s]... that no harm might happen to her, which could call the blush of shame to her cheek, or make her poor grandfather think of her as a lost, polluted thing.” By the end of the novel, Fanny has been rescued from near-prostitution by male characters multiple times and is as pure and chaste as she was at the novel’s start. Fanny is rewarded by God with the preservation of her virginity for emulating “proper” submissive female behavior. Thus, she is able to avoid punishment and survive the novel.¹⁰

This trend of imposing severe punishment upon female seduction victims for their loss of virtue continued in male-authored novels about fallen women throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century. In *The Destruction of Gotham* (1886), Joaquin Miller also tells the story of an innocent working-class girl who is seduced by an upper-class “gentleman” and, now unfit for respectable society, descends into the immoral world of prostitution in order to survive. Miller portrays the prostitute, Dottie, as a “ruined ingénue,” crazed and physically and spiritually degraded by the tribulations and immoral temptations of urban life.¹¹ Ultimately, Dottie’s

⁸ George Thompson, *Venus in Boston: A Romance of City Life* (New York: 1850), 76.

⁹ Renner, “Female Desire in Popular Antebellum Fiction,” 177-178.

¹⁰ Thompson, *Venus in Boston*, 16

¹¹ Laura Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989), 43.

spiritual “death” must be accompanied by corporeal death, for there is no place in society and no salvation for women who violate and pervert the very fabric of their nature, even if they are forced to do so by circumstances beyond their control. Miller casts Dottie as a victim of the morally-debasing effects of poverty and compares the terror the prostitute experiences while plying her trade to “the terror of a child who has seen, or rather fancies she has seen, a monster in the dark.” He also emphasizes the young prostitute’s isolation and abandonment by society at large, noting that the “only mother she had waiting now this side of heaven was Mother Earth.” Miller then details how society’s abandonment of Dottie and the young woman’s poverty has rendered her especially susceptible to the advances of immoral men and the allure of sex work’s monetary rewards.¹²

Although Miller appears to have empathy for Dottie’s plight, describing her as “poor, childlike, and helpless,” a characterization which negates her responsibility for her immoral profession, he does not spare her life. At the end of the novel, Dottie dies a dramatic and prolonged death, her body inevitably decaying along with her soul, and it is clear that neither stood a chance of avoiding prostitution’s moral rot.¹³ Laura Hapke posits that this complex and discordant treatment of the prostitute “reveals authorial conflicts between repression and acknowledgment of American prostitutes’ activity, anger at women and defense of the victim.”¹⁴ Although Miller had some sympathy for the prostitute and the poverty she often faced, his investment in nineteenth-century biological frameworks about white women’s inherent sexlessness rendered him unable to imagine a reality in which women could be fully forgiven for their moral and sexual indiscretions.

¹² Joaquin Miller, *The Destruction of Gotham* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886), 27.

¹³ Miller, *The Destruction of Gotham*, 27.

¹⁴ Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong*, 43.

Edgar Fawcett's *The Evil That Men Do* (1889), which also features a struggling prostitute as its protagonist, details how a naïve young woman can be both physically and morally ruined by the vices of urban life. In the novel, Cora Strang is a pious orphan from the countryside who supports herself as a pieceworker in the filthy tenement she lives in. Routinely harassed about her innocence by the drunken prostitutes who solicit men in her neighborhood, Cora eventually joins their ranks after she is drugged and “ruined” by an untrustworthy man named Casper Drummond. Cora then turns to prostitution and alcoholism to support herself and cope with her loss of virtue and her resulting spiritual death.

Prior to her rape and loss of virginity, Fawcett goes to great lengths to stress Cora's virtuousness and contrast it to the alcoholic prostitutes that surround her, deeming Cora “a delicate blush-rose in the midst of murk and soilure.”¹⁵ However, after her loss of chastity, Cora says, “what was much lower than the degradation into which she had fallen?” and the narrator notes that:

The ruin was complete... her outraged moral sense demanded some sort of narcotic; love had no part in her new mode of life... She had murdered sentiment, but she could not lay its haunting ghost. Wine brought her peace, and the hands that paid her the wage of self-abasement lifted to her lips the cup of deadened remorse... She felt herself harden, ossify... Horrible moments of fatigue and self-disgust would be banished with draughts of stimulant that made existence abnormally jocund.¹⁶

Fawcett concedes that once Cora has lost her virtue and thus violated women's nature, her spirit has been “murdered,” just like Dottie's and Mary's. Cora is painfully aware of this horrible reality, and the only way this formerly pious and chaste girl can cope with her spiritual ruin is by deadening her mind and emotions with alcohol. Of course, this spiritual death must also be accompanied by a corporeal one, for, like Miller, Fawcett cannot spare an immoral woman who

¹⁵ Edgar Fawcett, *The Evil That Men Do* (New York: Belford Company, 1889), 9.

¹⁶ Fawcett, *The Evil That Men Do*, 279; 306-307.

has defied nature. Notably, Fawcett rarely gives Cora a chance to speak for herself and justify her actions or push back against her unjust fate after her “fall.” Following her loss of virtue, Fawcett reduces Cora to a pitiable victim with no agency and no future, and she dies after her throat is slit by a fellow alcoholic who wishes for her to once again become the “unstained Cora of old” before a “trace of sin had ever touched her.”¹⁷ To Miller, the only way Cora’s spirit can be redeemed is through the physical death of her sullied body.

Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) further hammers upon the notion that the consequence of unmarried women’s loss of chastity is a painful descent into prostitution and eventual death. In this novella, a timid young girl named Maggie grows up into a beautiful and naïve young woman despite her tumultuous upbringing in an impoverished family that’s headed by an alcoholic mother and abusive father. However, Maggie is eventually taken in by an ostentatious young man named Pete who promises her wealth, love, and an escape from her dangerous home. Unfortunately, Maggie is soon abandoned by Pete for a more sophisticated-seeming woman and is brutally rejected by her family, including her brother, Jimmie, who has seduced and abandoned women himself. With nowhere else to turn and no means of supporting herself, Maggie becomes a streetwalker and eventually succumbs to the evils of the city streets and dies.

Prior to her fall, Crane notes that Maggie “blossomed in a mud puddle. She grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl.”¹⁸ Despite the potentially corrupting influences of the impoverished slum she grew up in and her abusive father and alcoholic mother, Maggie possesses an innate virtuousness that allows her to thrive. However, as soon as she gives into Pete and is duped by his promises of love, she is irredeemably “ruin[ed]”

¹⁷ Fawcett, *The Evil That Men Do*, 338.

¹⁸ Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 16.

and “gone teh deh devil!”¹⁹ Like the aforementioned authors, Crane references the desecration of Maggie’s soul and the fact that it is in need of “saving,” yet he condemns her family for their hypocritical inability to forgive Maggie for her moral transgressions and portrays Maggie’s participation in the sex trade as part of a desperate attempt to save herself from starving on the streets.²⁰ However, Crane remains ambivalent about the fallen woman, and Maggie dies not only because she is the victim of poverty and a cruel family, but because he can envision no better future for a debauched woman who prostitutes herself.

The fallen woman also appeared in the works of female writers during this period, though less often than in works by male authors and usually as parts of secondary plots, perhaps because it was more taboo and risky for “respectable” women to address such subjects. In contrast to most male authors, female writers tended towards more sympathetic and nuanced treatments of sex workers. Though the women were still usually cast as the victims of heartless rakes, female authors more often tended to provide their prostitutes with opportunities to redeem themselves rather than condemn them to death.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *Hedged In* (1870) is a particularly complex and empathetic account of a young woman’s loss of chastity and redemption. The novel tells the story of Nixy Trent, an abandoned and pregnant fifteen-year-old living in a prostitute shelter. After Nixy leaves the shelter and gives up her child, she is able to get a job as a domestic servant and begin to reintegrate into respectable society. However, Nixy is soon fired after Mrs. Myrtle, her devout Catholic employer, uncovers the young woman’s unsavory past. Despite the pleas of Nixy’s guardian of sorts, Mrs. Purcell, who informs Mrs. Myrtle that “Nixy is considered, in my family and this town, to be an unspotted woman... Nixy’s character here... is as high as yours or

¹⁹ Crane, *Maggie*, 31-32.

²⁰ Crane, *Maggie*, 51.

mine,” Nixy’s former employer is not swayed.²¹ Mrs. Myrtle informs Nixy that “[w]ith my family of innocent children I cannot feel as I ought to keep you under my roof . . . We could not, you see, sacrifice our own offspring to your reformation, though it would be very Christian and beautiful.”²² Although she knows helping Nixy would be an act of Christian kindness, Mrs. Myrtle hypocritically fires the young woman and casts her out onto the street. Nevertheless, Nixy perseveres and eventually manages to overcome her past and transform from a young, unwed mother living in a prostitute shelter into an upstanding member of her community and respected teacher.

In spite of this success, Nixy suffers an untimely death at the end of the novel by falling out of a window; her death is implied to be a suicide due to mental illness. Phelps makes it clear that Nixy’s mental struggles are a result of the severe emotional trauma she incurred during her trying years as a “fallen” young woman and struggling adolescent mother who was punished by “respectable,” but actually callous and cruel, members of society like Mrs. Myrtle; Nixy’s death is not meant to punish the troubled woman for her sexual transgressions, but to condemn society’s harsh treatment of her, for Phelps allows Nixy to fully redeem herself and reintegrate into middle-class society before she succumbs to her mental illness. Nixy’s body is found “at the foot of [a] great wooden cross,” which is both a reference to Mary Magdalene, a repentant prostitute who followed Jesus and is said to have watched his crucifixion, and a symbol of Nixy’s martyrdom for the “fallen” women society condemns and will not allow to seek redemption.²³ Through the tragic figure of Nixy, Phelps asserts that readers should consider how

²¹ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Hedged In* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), 148.

²² Phelps, *Hedged In*, 67.

²³ Phelps, *Hedged In*, 295; John 19:25.

they can help girls who have been led astray, no stigmatize them, for they are not “ruined;” rather, they are full of potential.

Another book published the same year, *Up Broadway, and its Sequel: A Life Story*, by Eleanor Kirk, also sympathized with the plight of the young single mother and railed against the callousness of the middle and upper classes regarding “fallen” women. The novel follows Mary, an impoverished single mother whose stigmatization and poverty provide her with only two options to support herself and her daughter: work as a domestic servant and be sexually harassed (and potentially sexually assaulted) by male members of the household she works for or prostitute herself. Ultimately, Mary chooses the latter, and the cruel treatment that she receives from customers and “respectable” society almost drives her to kill both herself and her child. However, she is eventually reunited with her child’s father, Charles, and they officially marry. Charles tells Mary, “I implore that you will consider me wholly responsible for the past, whatever that past may have been, and please never revert to it again... you shall be mine in a few moments by human law, as you have always been by divine.”²⁴ Charles stresses that Mary is not responsible for or ruined by her stint as a prostitute, for he understands she was forced into it by powerful social and economic forces. Kirk provides this fallen woman not only with forgiveness for her sexual transgressions, but also with true happiness and love through marriage, asserting that Mary is fully redeemable and still a valuable human being and wife despite her foray into sex work.

Work: A Story of Experience (1873) by Louisa May Alcott is a semi-autobiographical novel that tells the story of Christie Devon, a young woman who encounters various challenges working outside of her home in the industrial era and eventually becomes an activist for working

²⁴ Eleanor Kirk, *Up on Broadway, and its Sequel: A Life Story* (New York: Carleton, 1870), 159.

women. The novel features a subplot in which Christie gets a job as a seamstress at a factory and befriends a penitent former prostitute named Rachel who is trying to start her life anew after having an affair with a man that she never married and is succumbing to the temptations of street life. Rachel is originally hired at the factory because of her impeccable taste but is fired after it's revealed that she is an immoral "fallen" woman. Christie's superior informs her:

It appears that Rachel, whom we all considered a most respectable and worthy girl, has been quite the reverse. I shudder to think what the consequences of my taking her without a character (a thing I never do, and was only tempted by her superior taste as a trimmer) might have been if Miss Cotton, having suspicions, had not made strict inquiry and confirmed them.²⁵

Because of her sexual transgressions and perceived loss of virtue, Rachel is regarded as a woman of poor character and a dangerous influence on the other female workers.

Nevertheless, Christie sees the value in Rachel's character, quits her job at the factory in solidarity with her wrongfully fired friend, and even offers to take Rachel in. Rachel, however, turns Christie down because she feels she must redeem her life before she is worthy of such care and compassion. Alcott gives Rachel this chance to redeem herself when she saves her friend's life when Christie attempts to commit suicide. Alcott paints a compassionate portrait of the fallen woman, condemning society's indifference to her plight and asserting that her soul is not irreparably damaged by her loss of chastity, for loss of virginity does not necessarily result in loss of virtue. Rachel informs Christie: "I've been away, dear heart, hard at work in another city... [God] helped me in my work, for it has prospered wonderfully. All this year I have been busy with it, and almost happy; for I felt that your love made me strong to do it, and that, in time, I might grow good enough to be your friend."²⁶ Though Rachel is "fallen," she proves that she can

²⁵ Louisa May Alcott, *Work: A Story of Experience* (Boston: Roberts Brothers: 1873), 135.

²⁶ Alcott, *Work*, 161.

redeem herself through hard work and compassionate acts, including saving Christie's life and rescuing the young woman's soul from the deadly sin of suicide.

In *We and Our Neighbors: or, Records of an Unfashionable Street* (1875), Harriet Beecher Stowe also allows a fallen woman to redeem herself and pursue a respectable life, though, like in *Work*, this tale is confined to a subplot. In the novel, a young woman named Maggie is hired by a department store, where she is seduced by an untrustworthy man who takes advantage of the working-class girl's youthful naivety and desire for an easy life. Stowe writes:

Maggie was seen and coveted by the man who made her his prey. Maggie was seventeen, pretty, silly, hating work and trouble, longing for pleasure, leisure, ease and luxury; and he promised them all. He told her that she was too pretty to work, that if she would trust herself to him she need have no more care; and Maggie looked forward to a rich marriage and a home of her own.²⁷

After the heartless rake is through with Maggie, he sends her to a brothel to ply her new trade. However, despite Maggie's silliness, disdain for work, and desire for comfort and luxury, Stowe portrays the young prostitute as a sort of diamond in the rough, who is pure of heart and can redeem herself if helped onto the right path by some benevolent soul.

Maggie's family rejects her because she has disgraced them with her sinful loss of chastity, but the young woman eventually moves to a Magdalen home, a house of refuge meant to help prostitutes regain their dignity and leave prostitution behind, and meets the novel's main character, Eva. Eva sees Maggie's potential for redemption and reentrance into respectable society, so she brings Maggie home and employs her as a servant even though her family is opposed. Unfortunately, Maggie is torn apart with guilt about the harsh treatment Eva is receiving from her family because of her involvement with Maggie, so Maggie runs away and once again resorts to sex work to support herself. However, Eva eventually finds Maggie again

²⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *We and Our Neighbors* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1875), 326.

and takes her to a Methodist mission home. While there, Maggie eventually becomes a devout Christian and begins working for Eva as a seamstress.

Stowe makes it clear that although Maggie has sinned, she is still an innately good person with a soul that is salvageable and "a rich, warm, impulsive nature, full of passion and energy." Moreover, the young woman possesses "personal beauty and the power that comes from it...all that might have made the devoted wife and mother, fitted to give strong sons and daughters to our republic, and to bring them up to strengthen our country."²⁸ According to Stowe, all Maggie needs is someone to show her compassion and care so that these innately good characteristics can resurface and flourish. Once that happens, Maggie can reenter respectable society and even raise virtuous children herself.

In contrast to female writers like Stowe, nineteenth-century male novelists who wrote about prostitution frequently incorporated existing biological and intellectual frameworks about women's innate purity into their texts. These authors explicitly punished female characters for their sexual transgressions, indicating that unchaste women could never fully redeem themselves or successfully reintegrate into respectable society. These authors' female contemporaries, however, were much more aware of the nuances of the female sexual experience and were generally more sympathetic to the prostitutes they created. Accordingly, female novelists often condemned the insensitivity of middle- and upper-class society and allowed their characters who participated in the sex trade to achieve actual redemption.

About the author

²⁸ Stowe, *We and Our Neighbors*, 329.

Helen Stec is a 2018 graduate of the University of Connecticut, where she majored in history and English. Helen currently works for the Tufts University Digital Collections and Archives and hopes to eventually become a professor of race and sexuality in nineteenth-century America.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Alcott, Louisa May. *Work: A Story of Experience*. Boston: Roberts Brothers: 1873.

Crane, Stephen. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979.

Fawcett, Edgar. *The Evil That Men Do*. New York: Belford Company, 1889.

Kirk, Eleanor. *Up Broadway, and its Sequel: A Life Story*. New York: Carleton, 1870.

Lippard, George. *Quaker City; or, the Monks of Monk Hall*. Philadelphia: Leary, Stuart & Company, 1876.

Miller, Joaquin. *The Destruction of Gotham*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1886.

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Hedged In*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *We and Our Neighbors*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1875.

Thompson, George. *Venus in Boston: A Romance of City Life*. New York: 1850.

Secondary Sources

Cohen, Patricia Cline. *The Murder of Helen Jewett*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.

- Gilfoyle, Timothy J. *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.
- Hapke, Laura. *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989.
- Hobson, Barbara Meil. *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition*. New York: Basic Books, 1997, 139-140.
- Renner, Karen J. "Seduction, Prostitution, and the Control of Female Desire in Popular Antebellum Fiction." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65, no. 2 (2010): 166-91.
- Ryan, Mary. *Womanhood in America, from Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1975.
- Srebnick, Amy Gilman. *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Wood, Sharon E. *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.