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Redefining the Unrepentant Prostitute in Victorian Poetry

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Marijana Stojkovic

May 2015

Dr. Robert Sawyer, Chair

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Keywords: Victorian, Thomas Hardy, Augusta Webster, Amy Levy, feminism

ABSTRACT

Redefining the Unrepentant Prostitute in Victorian Poetry

by

Marijana Stojkovic

Poets such as Thomas Hardy, Augusta Webster, and Amy Levy portray prostitutes who seem guiltless about their choice of profession. Hardy's Amelia seems to symbolize the mutation of a pure country girl into a soiled disciple of evil; yet in the poem the changes in her life brought on by prostitution are evident in her drastically changed physical appearance and mannerism. Webster's Eulalie is an intelligent and well-spoken woman who undermines the stereotypical generalizations about prostitutes, relocating the source of the Great Social Evil from her profession to the institutionalized educational failure that trains women for nothing better than housekeeping. Levy's unnamed Magdalen, disease ridden and dying, may resemble a fallen woman. However, her lack of regret over the out-of-wedlock relationship with a man would make her an unrepentant prostitute in the eyes of the Victorians and she openly points to the real unmentionable of Victorian prostitution—the male client.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my parents, Sladjana Stojkovic and Slobodan Stefanovic. You have been the greatest support I could ever have asked for, and I am grateful to have you in my life. In those moments when I felt that I might not persevere, you pushed me to stand up and never give up. I miss you more than words can explain and I cannot wait to sit down with you and translate this work so you could understand what I have been working on so intensely for the past semester.

I am forever grateful to my father, Nenad Stojkovic, whom I always keep in my thoughts, and who is my eternal inspiration and motivation. You are the reason for my existence, perseverance, and success.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The written history of prostitution may seem to be a product of recent centuries, yet a quick glance at historical records yields a different result. The earliest known mention of prostitution occurs in Sumerian culture, their word for a female prostitute being *kar.kid* and it appears in the earliest lists of professions dating back to 2400 BCE. Additionally, six codes from Hammurabi's Code deal with the rights of prostitutes and their children in Babylon. Around 1780 BCE, when this document was drafted, prostitution had to be of such importance to the society as to make its way into the first written law document of that society. Moving on to a slightly younger culture, in 400 BCE Ancient Greece coined the word *hetaira*, a term used for a female companion that was used to denote a courtesan in Athens. Their profession granted them entrance to some of the most prestigious institutions of the time, enabling them to become more educated and cultivated than an average female citizen. Bella Vivante claims that “Aspasia, was a hetaira, one of the highly educated women from eastern Greece who entertained and accompanied men in many of their festivals, often including sex. As the mistress of Perikles, a principal ruler of Athens in the mid-fifth century BCE, Aspasia's influence on the Athenian leader was reputedly enormous; at various times his policies and speeches were ascribed to her” (88). The social and cultural standing which higher-class prostitutes enjoyed in ancient times is indicative of the societal acceptance of their occupation and the acknowledgment of important roles they had in influencing political organizations.

Fast forward some 2200 years to Friedrich Engels, a German social scientist who perceived prostitution as “the compliment” of monogamous marriage and predicted its ending “with the transformation of the means of production into social property” (138). In 1884, he

published *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, and using the terms borrowed from the Ancient Greeks, Engels explained that:

Hetaerism derives quite directly from group marriage, from the ceremonial surrender by which women purchased the right of chastity. Surrender for money was at first a religious act; it took place in the temple of the goddess of love, and the money originally went into the temple treasury.... Among other peoples hetaerism derives from the sexual freedom allowed girls before marriage. (129)

Always attacked by the governing patriarchy, prostitution in actuality worked according to the principles those same officious men established. Despite the fact that Engels' scientific thinking was not without flaws, his ideology was of great significance because it unmasked the origins of prostitution, demonstrating that it was birthed by the changing attitudes towards sexuality combined with certain religious beliefs. Engels continued this argument, adding that:

With the rise of the inequality of property... wage labor appears sporadically side by side with slave labor, and at the same time, as its necessary correlate, the professional prostitution of free women side by side with the forced surrender of the slave. . . For hetaerism is as much a social institution as any other; it continues the old sexual freedom—to the advantage of the men. (130)

One of his main arguments defines prostitution as a “social institution,” recognizing it as a part of the socio-economic structure of the established system. Likewise, the institutionalization of private property and slavery brought about the modification of the economic and social situations, resulting in a transformed perception of sexual relations.

With all this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the prostitute persistently troubled the Victorian world. In a time period when every authorial institution seemed to be obsessed with the

idealization of female virginity, the consequences of sexual experience outside wedlock were commonly believed to result in the moral and psychological ruin of women. Popular attitudes about women lay beneath the discriminating evangelical ideologies which proposed that a woman who falls from her purity can never return to ordinary society, as her soul, too thin and fragile to protect her, leaves her exposed to dangers greater than those faced by a man. When applied to women, “virtue” and “physical chastity” were interchangeable terms; however, a Victorian young man did not tarnish his virtue when he tumbled in the hay with a cottage girl or visited a brothel, although he might have felt brief remorse sometime later.

Apart from a handful of contemporary studies, as well as the most recent historical analyses, the overwhelming majority of studies of the prostitute focus on her as a literary figure rather than a historical one, and attempt to reconstruct the Victorian ideology of this wicked woman almost entirely from literary sources. Assuming that such a complex figure in Victorian culture can be restored solely from scarce literary sources is quite problematic, since it ignores the manners in which, as Aram Veesser describes, “every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices” as “literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably” (xi).

The Victorian literary prostitute was most commonly publicized as a false, or painted woman. The viewing of a prostitute as “artificial” came as a result of her lack of opportunity to exert control over the circumstances that came to define her. Therefore, Victorian culture created a link between her lack of freedom and the falseness of her physical and moral character. This artificiality became most evident when deliberate forms of falseness, such as cunning and lying, were defined as being innate to her.

The unrepentant prostitute disturbed the everyday life of the nineteenth century patriarchy because she was an adapter. She was not plagued by any particular sinful nature but

instead turning to prostitution as a part time job on the path to an improved monetary situation, which could, and often did, lead to eventual respectability. The literary fallen woman was viewed as a destitute and drowned errant victim who shamefully alienates herself from the respectable realm of the family hearth. From the social and cultural stand, death was the only honorable symbol of the transforming power of her fall. Unlike her, the unrepentant prostitute in Victorian poetry is a free agent who offers a glimpse into the flexible and non-retributive world of Britain's sex market. The distinction between the prostitute and the fallen woman is important as it clearly defines the social and moral realms to which these women belonged. William Starbuck defined the latter in 1864:

When a woman falls from her purity there is no return for her—as well may one attempt to wash the stain from the sullied snow. Men sin and are forgiven; but the memory of a woman's guilt cannot be removed on earth. Her nature is so exquisitely refined that the slightest flaw becomes a huge defect. Like perfume, it admits of no deterioration, it ceases to exist when it ceases to be sweet. Her soul is an exquisitely precious, a priceless gift, and even more than man's perilous possession. (100)

The fallen woman was a victim of ethical hypocrisy, just like the unrepentant prostitute, but her involvement with “sin” leaves both her body and soul destroyed. Starbuck was aware that once a woman defies the patriarchal codes of conduct she becomes defected, an object that is no longer in demand, and thus should be disposed of. For the woman, this means a life of psychological torment over the lost virtuous life and the constant feeling of shame and regret. The unrepentant prostitute, however, stands proudly at the opposite end of the spectrum, the stark distinction between her and the fallen woman obvious. She has no regrets over the lost “virtue” because she

sees it for what it really is—an abstract concept created to make women believe they held the power over their own bodies and minds, while those same constructs worked to limit their value as unique human beings by focusing on more general and more surface physical characteristics.

For the most part, literature and art mirrored the prevailing ideology which confused the fallenness of females with her sister sex-workers. Victorian authors had a tendency to invest social and moral authority over a prostitute's narrative, thus turning her into the object of reformer discourse. In other words, her account was used to inform the readership of a great "social problem" of which she is invariably a victim and hardly ever a critic. The power resided in the figure of her author and potential savior, all of which usually worked to disempower the sexually transgressive character. However, even among those authors who were involved in the reclamation movement, including such luminaries as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, there was oftentimes confusion about the class, appearance, and behavior of the women they were seeking to reclaim. The confusion on the part of the reclamation workers could be said to have been instructive, as it served to prove that the conventional Victorian understanding of prostitutes sometimes bore little to no resemblance to the actual women they were attempting to "save." This proved that the accepted "truths" about female sex-workers were in dire need of correction.

However, in the poetry of Thomas Hardy, Amy Levy and Augusta Webster, we find prostitutes who seem to offer little repentance for their choice of profession. The Victorian patriarchal system was not kind to women, and it tremendously limited their powers in society. Rising above one's station was not only frowned upon, but for the majority of the population it was a goal most unachievable. Hardy's Amelia, Levy's Magdalen, and Webster's Eulalie are women who show the public that life of a prostitute does not consist simply of devastating

remorse and suicidal thoughts, as these women accepted their profession as labor and managed to provide for themselves without becoming a burden to society. Often called liars and thieves, these three women defied the accepted beliefs about prostitutes and demonstrated that there was more to their “fall” than simply a lack of the abstract sense of morality.

These literary characters show the readers that the life of a prostitute was not the generally accepted, highly prejudicial narrative of the woman fallen from the grace of patriarchally-prescribed rules of conduct. Hardy's Amelia seems to symbolize the mutation of a pure country girl into a soiled disciple of evil; yet in the poem her ruined persona incites admiration in her former friend as the changes in her life brought on by prostitution are evident in her drastically changed physical appearance and mannerism. Webster's Eulalie is a highly intelligent and well-spoken woman who undermines the stereotypical generalizations about prostitutes, relocating the source of the Great Social Evil from her profession to the institutionalized educational failure that trains women for nothing better than housekeeping. Levy's unnamed Magdalen, disease ridden and dying, may resemble a fallen woman. However, her lack of regret over the out-of-wedlock relationship with a man would make her an unrepentant prostitute in the eyes of the Victorians and she openly points to the real unmentionable of Victorian prostitution—the male client.

It is this unctuous portrayal of prostitution that I will explore, stripping it of any morally and socially imposed constructs and defining it instead as a social institution which is a part of the socio-economic structure of the Victorian system. I will examine the hypocritical treatment of prostitutes in Victorian society based on the three available works that explain the unrepentant prostitute. These works offer insight into social and gender inequalities that led these women to this profession and redefine prostitution in terms of the supply and demand doctrine.

CHAPTER 2

“O DIDN’T YOU KNOW I’D BEEN RUINED?”: UNDERSTANDING THE RHETORIC OF PROSTITUTION IN THOMAS HARDY’S “THE RUINED MAID”

Introduction

From the fashionable mansions of Mayfair to the slums of Whitechapel, the Victorian prostitute was everywhere. One honorable member of the Anatomic society, surgeon William Tait, was particularly concerned with the growing number of “unchaste” women who inhabited Great Britain. His opinions on the subject of prostitution and prostitutes are summed up in his work “Magdalenism—An Inquiry.” Deemed one of the greatest evils of their time, prostitution was defined by Tait as something distinct from the prostitute. According to his own tract, “prostitution is understood merely as an act; while prostitute is always employed to denote a person who habitually follows the course of conduct implied in successive acts” (1). In the discourse of patriarchal Victorian society, a prostitute stood for the life of impurity and licentiousness, associated with the slum of society and physical and moral putrefaction. Always perceived as a threat to the morality of the general public, a prostitute was made a martyr for numerous evils that befell England in the nineteenth century.

Tait estimated that in Edinburgh, for example, twenty-five percent of the female population engaged in prostitution, making it “better in point of morality than London” (5) as there was one prostitute for every sixty men. William Acton relied on visual methods when determining the number of women whose sole profession was prostitution. In Judith Flanders’ recent book *The Victorian City*, she mentioned that William Acton informed his friend that during the walk from the Opera to Portland-place, he managed to count as many as one hundred and eighty five prostitutes. The plausibility of his statement was compromised by the fact that he had no factual proof that all of those women were sex-workers. Given the short length of his

walk, it was more than possible that his judgment was based on their clothes and mannerisms, which cannot be accepted as fully reliable markers. The truth of the matter is that today, just like almost two hundred years ago, we do not even have firm knowledge of the number of prostitutes on the streets of London, as the very term prostitute was never clearly defined.

When describing the seven curses of London in 1869, James Greenwood dedicated an entire chapter to the phenomenon of “prostitute,” informing his readers that this

monstrous evil in question has grown to its present dimensions chiefly because we have silently borne with it and let it grow up in all its lusty rankness under our noses; and rather than pluck it up by the roots, rather than acknowledge its existence even, have turned away our heads and inclined our eyes skyward, and thanked God for the many mercies conferred on us. (272)

He believed these women preyed on the heart of Victorian society, referring to them as “the blotches and plague-spots” (272) which have infected the social body. Not only did he forgo any redemptive possibilities for this particular “species of vice,” but he also believed that any kind of government-initiated regulations of prostitution would only serve to legalize and encourage it. In his opinion, “it can never be right to regulate what it is wrong to do and wrong to tolerate” (272); but in order to eliminate it, it must be banned and repressed by the authority. His adamant hatred of prostitution desired to abolish it in its entirety; he saw no middle ground and opposed any system that attempted to supervise, regulate or license prostitution, calling it “a greater evil than all the maladies (moral and physical) which now flow from its unchecked prevalence” (273). He specifically despised the unrepentant prostitute because she did not feel any remorse over the loss of her abstract morality.

Despite these definitions of a prostitute, there was much confusion about the general

meaning of the aforementioned term. It included a number of possible scenarios, from women actively soliciting on the streets to women who lived with men to whom they were not married.

Judith Flanders poses a significant question:

Does it encompass a woman in employment, who intermittently or regularly is given additional cash by a long-term, or short-term, partner? Does it take into account a woman whose wages do not entirely support her, or who is temporarily out of work, who receives financial help from one or more men? The rigid separation of 'good' and 'bad' women did not hold even according to Victorian morality. There were women who enjoyed a nightlife that was not acceptable to moralists ... there were women in long-term relationships living in communities that traditionally did not resort to the church for sanctification. Many in the nineteenth century regarded any and all of these women as prostitutes. (394)

Nineteenth-century society was quick to jump to conclusions and easily accepted the prejudice that women from lower classes were, by their very nature, involved in prostitution. However, given that the poor had to engage in hard labor for fourteen to sixteen hours a day, it does not seem plausible that those women would have the time, let alone the energy, to partake in this profession. On the other hand, women living in the countryside often attempted to find ways to leave the farms and hope to experience better lives in the city. Working in the fields was strenuous, particularly when combined with more strict gender inequality that rendered farm girls utterly powerless. Finding a man who would be willing to uproot her from the controlling atmosphere of patriarchal dictatorship and bring her into the city was a dream come true for the majority of farm girls.

For the most part, literature and art mirrored the prevailing ideology concerning the

fallenness of female sex-workers. Victorian authors had a tendency to invest social and moral authority over a prostitute's narrative, thus turning her into the object of reformer discourse. Her account was used to inform the readership of a great "social problem" of which she is invariably a victim and hardly ever a critic. The power resided in the figure of her author and potential savior, all of which worked to disempower the sexually transgressive character. However, even among those authors who were involved in the reclamation movement, there was oftentimes confusion about the class, appearance, and behavior of the women they were seeking to reclaim. The confusion on the part of the reclamation workers could be said to have been instructive, as it served to prove that the conventional Victorian understanding of prostitutes sometimes bore little to no resemblance to the actual women they were attempting to "save." This proved that the accepted "truths" about female sex-workers were in dire need of correction.

Thomas Hardy and the "Woman Question"

This Great Social Evil inspired a plethora of writings that either focused on condemnation of the prostitute, or the evangelical attempts to lead her to moral redemption. Even though the theme of unfortunate, betrayed innocence prevailed over the career of the successful courtesan, some authors dared create literary art that celebrated the scandalous woman. The mid-nineteenth century saw an outburst in written materials on prostitutes and fallen women, and young Thomas Hardy was one to offer his contribution. Around this time he had just moved to London and began writing poetry, which he was eagerly submitting to magazines. Although he was quite young when he started writing poetry, the works from 1860s offer an insight into Hardy's emotions. Both Evelyne Hardy and Michael Millgate, two prominent Hardy biographers, agree that women were his major inspiration and the theme he explored in many different ways. Though his mood varies, there is a constant return to the female and the ideas of love, loss, and

revulsion, with a few comic and satirical pieces such as “The Two Men,” “Dream of the City Shopwoman,” and “The Ruined Maid.”

Although Hardy destroyed many of those early poems, the ones that survived were “remarkable in their relentless confrontation of the truth, however chilling” (Dolin 703). He feared that he was not able to hold his own in the world at all, which is why many of his works, both poetry and prose, reflect the struggle between the independent individual in liberal modernity and the dependent “relational self,” who is unable to “venture very far from the creative sources of family and community” (Dolin 703). He understood that some limitations were innate to people, but for the most part, he tended to find the roots of the aforesaid struggle in social constructs of the time. During his stay in London in 1860s he became acquainted with the city and the manner in which its society functioned. That knowledge is apparent in his early works where he confesses the dependence of “A whole life's circumstance on a hap of birth” (Hardy 285).

Hardy was well acquainted with the writings of John Stuart Mill and his claim that “what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulations in others” (1065). In the 1860s the “Woman Question” was a frequent subject of writing and debate, and women's suffrage began attracting more support. Mill was one of the supporters and he himself introduced “the first Parliamentary motion extending the franchise to women in 1866” (Greenblatt 1061). The emotional reaction to the scientific and philosophical changes and discoveries that were happening at that time appeared in the works Hardy read religiously. He even had a chance to hear Mill speak in public in 1865, following Mill's election to Parliament as Member for Westminster. In a letter written after the event Hardy explained:

When I—a young man living in London—drew near to the spot, Mill was speaking....The religious sincerity of his speech was jarred on by his environment....The picture of him as personified earnestness surrounded for the most part by careless curiosity derived an added piquancy. (Hardy 68)

This letter was found in Hardy's copy of Mill's "On Liberty", serving as an evidence of the overwhelming influence Mill had over Hardy in his early twenties. It was such liberal, and for that time revolutionary, ideas, that shaped young Hardy's mindset. Their influence is evident in much of his work, particularly the poetry from 1860s.

There was always some kind of restless uncertainty in these early poems of Hardy's, particularly in those that have a more personal theme. Often described as "sympathetic and responsive to the lives and life-stories of others, and under no illusions about his own powers of self-determination" (Dolin 703), Hardy was believed to have possessed the ability to penetrate a woman's mind and understand her thoughts as easily as he could his own. On his twenty-fifth birthday he wrote—"Feel as if I had lived a long time, and done very little. Walked about by moonlight in the evening. Wondered what woman, if any I should be thinking about in five years' time" (Millgate 91). There seems to have always been a woman on his mind, either as an inspiration or a creation of his own, and his early poems, such as "Amabel" and "The Ruined Maid" testify to that idea. Both poems have an unorthodox woman as the central character.

In "Amabel," Hardy expresses the dismay at seeing a woman's "...ruined hues/...her gown,/ once rose, now earthen brown" (1, 5-6). Michael Millgate believes that this poem was inspired by Hardy's accidental encounter with a visibly aged Julia Augusta Martin soon after his arrival to London. As a schoolboy he must have developed feelings for Mrs. Martin that lingered with him for decades, supposedly inspiring his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*. She was

a woman who marked his childhood and school years, and he “did not forget, then or ever, the woman who had overwhelmed him not only by her fond and indulgent encouragement but also by a cultivation and elegance, a voluptuousness of dress and person” (Millgate 49). His early poetry shows the tendency to associate clothes and manners of behavior with certain social classes, and that is one of the themes that will be developed in detail later in this chapter.

In “The Ruined Maid” Hardy explores the theme of unrepentant prostitution in a manner that does not offer any words of condemnation. Through the character of Amelia, he tries to show that it is not the desire to defy the patriarchy that led women to prostitution, but the lack of opportunity for women to independently improve their lives. In a letter to his friend Edward Clodd, written some years before the publication of “The Ruined Maid,” he said: “I can only state (most imperfectly, alas!) cases in which natural and human laws create tragic dramas. The philanthropists must do the rest” (qtd. in Davis 71). Hardy understood that philanthropists and writers both had the opportunity to address the same issues, though by employing different means. Hardy's susceptibility to the lives of others enabled him to create stories of such intense feeling, since, just like he mentioned in the letter, nothing creates tragic dramas better than the laws of nature and society. It is human laws that created the double standard of calling the profession a sin and labeling its customers as victims.

The specific sub-class of prostitutes known as unrepentant was the thorn in the side of Victorian society. She was not mentioned often because her perception of prostitution as a profession that harms no one, yet entertains a few, did not go along with the prejudicial representation of prostitutes as sin-ridden and publicly promiscuous. Exploring Thomas Hardy's “The Ruined Maid,” written shortly upon his arrival from the countryside to London in 1860s, I will demonstrate that the figure of an unrepentant prostitute may not have been such a Great

Social Evil after all, as even those seeking to reclaim her had a hard time recognizing her. I will begin by explaining that Hardy held the power to save or condemn, but he opted not to lead the reader either direction. Instead, he focused on showing that sometimes what human laws decree may have a complex background story that needs to be told. Coming from the countryside, Hardy was acutely aware of the clash between the social classes; and in the character of Amelia, he shows that a pure country girl would never be able to create a life of security in the city without additional help. Just like the society believed the soul of the prostitute needed to be saved, high-class courtesans argued they needed to save their bodies as well, and through their trade they earned the sustenance necessary for physical survival. Finally, Hardy intentionally breaks the complicated established stereotypes that classify prostitutes as publicly lascivious and “painted,” and instead sketches a picture of a sophisticated young woman with a delicate cheek, wearing fair garments that incite admiration.

Thomas Hardy and “The Ruined Maid”

In “The Ruined Maid,” one of Hardy’s early sarcastic poems, the reader encounters a portrayal of a prostitute that differs from common descriptions of condemnation or redemption for which works of art were accused. According to Hardy's notes, the inspiration for this poem came to him in 1866, while he still lived at 16 Westbourne Park Villas in London, but it was not published until 1901. The poem develops around the satirical contrast between a prostitute and a simple country girl. Living in London at the time when “The Ruined Maid” was written, Hardy had a first-hand experience with the clash of the cultures and social classes. In the summer of 1866, the year when the idea for “The Ruined Maid” was conceived, Hardy was

in a volatile mood, reconciling himself to disappointments, entertaining multitudes of fresh hopes and ideas but despairing of their realization....It was this year, and

probably this summer, that saw the final collapse of his long cherished, essentially quietist, ambition of a country living. (Millgate 92)

This period, particularly the summer of 1866, marks a definite change in Hardy. Though he would fight depression and looming darkness during his years in London, it was at this time that his writing focused more on the hostile forces of conventional attitudes towards gender, age and, most importantly, social class.

The mutation of the pure country girl into the disciple of evil is given a mocking undertone in “The Ruined Maid” when the stories of her past and the present collide. The country girl is impressed by the persona who stands before her, and she describes to the readers the well-dressed and sophisticated young woman; yet her comments are met by Amelia's sarcastic retort: “O didn't you know I'd been ruined?” (4). What sets this poem apart from the majority of literary works on prostitutes and fallen women is the lack of the author's judgmental tone and the overwhelming desire for her salvation. Hardy does not condemn Amelia for the choices she made, nor does he encourage the readers to do so. As we will see, he presented the Victorian public with a situation that might not have been the general rule, but it most definitely was a rather probable scenario for many women. Given the number of women who were left to fend for themselves, either because they left their homes or were abandoned by the men in their lives, it comes as no surprise that many had to resort to any means available to provide for themselves.

“The Ruined Maid” opens with a joyful cry from a simple country girl who has just run into an old acquaintance. At the time, London was the cultural and social center of the country, and those who had the opportunity to visit it, let alone live in it, were perceived as the lucky ones. Although the poem is a dialogue between two young women, the reader learns of Amelia

and her abridged life story almost entirely from the unnamed country girl. In just five stanzas Hardy manages to paint the story of a rural life of hard labor and destitution, setting it as a background which explains, to those who are willing to listen, the reasons for Amelia's fall from impoverished "virtue" to emancipated "ruin." Her case was one of many, as London was ingloriously known for its innumerable prostitutes and fallen women, which caused a vast number of reclamation workers to dedicate their time and effort to finding solutions for such a troublesome problem. Yet even the most meticulous among those who desired the abolition of prostitution encountered problems when they attempted to factually present the number of prostitutes in Britain, as they had difficulty recognizing them.

Judith Flanders mentions an interesting situation which shows how easily any woman could have been mistaken for a prostitute, proving that a choice of profession had little to do with the manner in which women behaved in public, or even less to do with the clothes they wore. She mentions a lithograph from 1865 named "Scene in Regent Street" that shows

a "Philanthropic Divine" attempts to hand an improving tract to a fashionably dressed woman. Perhaps she had been approached before, for in this parody she sounds remarkably tolerant as she replies, "Bless me, Sir...I am not a social evil, I'm only waiting for a bus." (403)

An article from the *Saturday Review* of 1865 warned women that if they dressed attractively they should expect to be looked at, which can immediately lead to the assumption that they are morally sinful. Therefore, if they wish to avoid such situation, they should "dress thoroughly unbecomingly. Let them procure poke bonnets, stint their skirts to a moderate circumference and cultivate sad-looking underclothing" (Flanders 403). This suggestion is satirical in its nature, but it mirrors the prevailing attitudes toward women and the male control of the female body. The

“signals” that would reveal a woman of “bad behavior” were “slow walking, looking around, fashionable dress—were also natural behavior on a shopping street” (Flanders 403).

From the words spoken by the unnamed acquaintance, we learn that Amelia from “The Ruined Maid” once lived in the country where her days were filled with hard labor, as she was “tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks” (6). The life of a peasant girl was not an easy one, and the only thing most of them had to look forward to was marriage into yet another peasant family—marrying above one's station was not the norm for them. In *Jude the Obscure*, when Hardy is describing Jude's first encounter with Arabella, he gives us a glimpse into the life of peasant girls, as there were “three young women kneeling, with buckets and platters beside them containing heaps of pigs' chitterlings, which they were washing in the running water” (33). Although created later in Hardy's career, Arabella bears all the markings of what Victorian society would consider to be a prostitute. She does not start out as one though; in the beginning she sees Jude as a one-way ticket for leaving the country life and moving into Christminster.

Arabella and her friends are aware of the dangers poor women like themselves are exposed to. and they concur that she should find a way to marry Jude, as there is not “a gentleman that's honorable and serious-minded as he” (43). Even the “simple” country girls like they are agree that “God forbid that I should say a sojer, or sailor, or commercial gent form the towns, or any of them that be slippery with poor women. I'd do no friend that harm!” (43). Once married, getting a divorce was virtually impossible. The law still stated that in order for a married couple to divorce a special Act of Parliament had to issue the permit, which cost more than anything lower or even middle-class people could afford and which was not granted easily. Therefore, Hardy portrays his social comment by showing that women like Arabella, who would realize that what was once a “marriage of opportunity” has turned into a “marriage from hell,”

would have to accept the fact that from then on any men they would live with, and perhaps even start a family with, would technically be out of wedlock, thus turning those women into prostitutes.

It was such a destiny that Amelia from “The Ruined Maid” fled: “[she] left us in tatters, without shoes and socks” (5), with hands that were “like paws then” and “face blue and bleak” (13). Hardy loved the country and longed for it, but he was acutely aware of its downside. In 1866 he wrote “From Her in the Country,” and through the voice of a female character confesses

One little bud is far more sweet to me
Than all man's urban shows; and then I stood
Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree;....
But it was in vain, for I could not see worth....
And mused again on city din and sin,
Longing to madness I might move therein! (Hardy 6-8, 11, 13-14)

Hardy was aware of this double standard between the country and the city, particularly when it involved a woman as the main protagonist. It was mentioned before that he knew much about the “Woman Question,” and his interest in it is evident not only in the novels that brought him fame, but also in his earliest writings, inaugurating his career. Amelia from “The Ruined Maid” is not a unique case, and her story was not something unheard of—Hardy must have been aware of hundreds of women who found their way to London and other large cities in search of a better life. For some who found themselves on the streets of London, prostitution may not have been the primary choice of profession.

Eulalie, from Augusta Webster's “A Castaway,” is in a position similar to Amelia's. They both view their past as the time of great unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life. Amelia was

dressed “in tatters,” with no shoes or socks, physically and emotionally drained by her destitute position on the farm. Eulalie shares Amelia's disregard for the past, because she can no longer imagine herself in her old home. Like Hardy, who vainly tries to re-confirm his love of the country, he “could not see the worth” (285). Eulalie confesses, “you go back to the old home, and 'tis not your home, has no place for you, and if it had, you could not fit you in it” (Webster 213-215). There is nothing left for her there, apart from the memories of the kind of life that drove her away from the family hearth and into the unpredictable world of Victorian London, where she choose the life of monetary security and cultural improvement. Both Amelia and Eulalie are unrepentant prostitutes who are explaining their past to the reader, not because they seek excuses, as they do not see their profession as being sinful, but for helping others understand that passive and powerless kind of life society prescribes for women was simply not enough for them. They believed their lives could be improved, and since the patriarchy did not allow them to do it on their own, they had to turn to an alternative solution, which was at the same time sustained and vehemently criticized by men.

Hardy's Amelia was obviously a higher-class courtesan who might have relied on only one partner, since a woman would be labeled prostitute even if involved with solely one man out of wedlock. Among British sex-workers, there were various classes of prostitutes, and as such they represented different spheres within the profession. It would be erroneous to assume that no woman was brought into such occupation by deception and broken promises; equally, it would be highly implausible to conclude that there were not women who opted for that profession by choice, finding no moral stigma attached to it. The truth of the matter was that women were in insecure situations which, for the most part, they were powerless to change. At the time when one of the rare “privileges” women had was marriage, those who were unmarried, widowed or

abandoned were faced with a grave truth—they had no one who could provide for them but themselves. Even the “lucky” ones who were able to secure marital bliss still had to live with the image of the Angel in the House before them, and in the shadow of *pater familias* behind, as everything they might have owned prior to entering the marriage agreement became the property of the husband.

Despite the predominant misconception that all prostitutes are destitute souls ridden with guilt over their lost virtue, Hardy's Amelia serves as an example of a woman willing to better herself in spite of the difficulties that societal constructs of gender and class created for her. The readers learn that ever since she left the country and “ruined” herself, she became a different person: someone whose appearance and manners belong to the middle class rather than to a pig sty. There is a striking similarity between her and the anonymous writer of the letter the *London Times* published in early January 1858. Like Amelia, who wears “such fine garments” (3), with “gay bracelets and bright feathers three” (7), One More Unfortunate claims:

I go to the Opera, I go to Almack's, I go to the theaters, I go to quiet, well-conducted casinos, I go to all places of public amusement, behaving myself with as much propriety as society can exact. I pay business visits to my tradespeople, the most fashionable of the West-end...and they solicit my patronage as earnestly and cringingly as if I were Madam, the lady of the right rev. [sic] patron of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. They find my money as good and my pay better (for we are robbed on every hand) than that of Madam, my Lady.

(Anonymous 1594)

Women who were involved in the profession of higher-class prostitution did not take part in a behavior that would disturb the peace and order of everyday society.

Augusta Webster informs the reader through the character of Eulalie that women like her tend to exercise modesty rather than public debauchery:

Here's a jest!

What word will fit the sense but modesty?

A wanton I but modest!

Modest, true;

I'm not drunk in the streets, ply not for hire

at infamous corners with my likenesses

of the humbler kind; yes, modesty's my word. (45-51)

Considered “outcasts” from the proper society, these women created a social class of their own, adopting an appearance and affluent style of life that differentiated them from other working-class women. The clothes they wore, particularly the choice of the dress itself, became the most visible symbol of a prostitute's relative affluence.

In *The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality*, Ronald Pearsall informs his readers that numerous middle-class social commentators complained about the “painted dressy women flaunting along the streets” in “dirty white muslin and greasy cheap blue silk” (32), representing a bad influence on highly impressionable servant girls. For example, the naive peasant girl Amelia meets in the streets of London is impressed by her garments and immediately makes a connection between her appearance and “such prosperity” (3). Whether a working-class girl or a farm girl, these women came from lower classes and were solely accustomed to a life of hard labor. Their dress code was insignificant and, quite probably, non-existent. Considering that their daily duties involved either working in factories or in the fields, they required both practical and simple attire. Therefore, the life of a high-class prostitute could easily fascinate many of

these poor girls, who might still have been “virtuous” but nevertheless unhappy with their position in society.

Professional courtesans such as Hardy's Amelia or Webster's Eulalie made sure their clothes matched their rank within the sub-class of society to which they belonged. Eulalie points out the difference between a lower and higher-class prostitute in terms of her attire, but she remains firm that “let no one be above her trade,” (68) openly stating her kindredship with any woman whose profession is prostitution. While women like Amelia and Eulalie sell beauty and “have a home, all velvet and marqueterie and pastilles/ and . . . set fashions and wear cobweb lace” (70-71, 73), other prostitutes of lower rank work with men who place less importance on beauty and sophistication. Thus, according to Eulalie, they

crouch in fetid garrets....

[and] although she hide her skeleton I rags...

the difference lies but in my choicer ware

that I sell beauty and she ugliness. (69, 72, 74-75)

Therefore, if prostitution is to be accepted as subdivision of Victorian society, the social stratification within it is crucial for understanding that one general rule, whether prejudicial or advantageous in nature, cannot be recklessly applied to an entire group. When Amelia's friend says, “I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown” (21), her admission resonates with the lower-class ideology that perceived a high-class prostitute as a successful woman who managed to provide for herself a life of social improvement and monetary security. Even Hardy understood there was some value in Amelia's ruin, as the previous version of line twenty, “There's an advantage in ruin” (198), as opposed to the one used today “One's pretty lively when ruined” (198).

As mentioned before, Victorian patriarchy was determined to represent prostitutes as painted women whose outward appearance served as a beautiful mask for the decayed soul. This insistence on the duplicity of their character is given a mocking undertone in “The Ruined Maid” when the simple country girl exclaims how “I’m bewitched by your delicate cheek” (18), revealing that the preconceived notions about prostitutes were based on what those criticizing it wanted it to be rather than what it truly was. Amelia, just like Augusta Webster's unrepentant prostitute Eulalie, does not “paint” her face and rely on deceit in her line of work. Her “delicate cheek” resembles the fragility of a middle-class or even high-class female who would be of pure character and honest disposition. Given that higher-class prostitutes did not publicly display their profession, nor did their behavior indicate the manner in which they provided for themselves, it comes as no surprise that the preconceived notion of all prostitutes as “painted women” were nothing more than a stereotype. Webster's Eulalie makes sure to address that prejudicial issue and informs the public that: “I braid my hair'--but braids are out of date; 'I paint my cheek'-- I always wear them pale” (160-161). The outdated belief that a prostitute, particularly one of higher standing within her sub-culture, can be recognized based only on her costume-like outward appearance has no factual background, and literary characters like Amelia and Eulalie serve to point to this incorrect societal belief.

The figure of a high-class unrepentant prostitute defies the ideologies that desired to place a preconceived social stigma onto her subculture. She was not allowed to have a voice of her own or to present her side of the argument. Unwilling to be a victim of social injustice and moral duplicity, the successful unrepentant prostitute managed to find a way to have her side of the story publicly portrayed. From anonymous letters sent to and published in some of the major magazines and newspapers, to appearing in poetry, she was determined to educate the public and

open its eyes to the deceptive versions of the moral codes that governed a woman's life. Thomas Hardy was one of the youngest writers who dared create such a character; and even though "The Ruined Maid" was not published until 1901, the fact that it was conceived and drafted in 1866 shows that the prejudicial perception of prostitutes was not universal. In England, Hardy might have been one of the few writers to openly stand in the defense of a high-class unrepentant prostitute, but his voice reverberates with the growing acceptance of prostitution as trade, where the current demand is met with adequate supply. Additionally, he goes beyond the economic side of this profession and offers an insight into what kind of a life a high-class prostitute would lead, demonstrating that in the public eye she was equal to a middle-class woman, who might have saved her "virtue" but who did not possess the freedom of choice his Amelia did. The main problem for the unrepentant prostitute was not the societal concern over the loss of her soul, but the fact that as a female she managed to undermine the controlling patriarchal grip that kept her powerless and poor and took charge of her life.

CHAPTER 3

“DID I SO LIVE CONTENT IN SUCH A LIFE, SEEING NO LARGER SCOPE:” THE UNREPENTANT PROSTITUTE AS A COMMENTARY ON THE FAILURE OF WOMEN’S EDUCATION

The Prostitute and Female Education Through History

Ancient Greece is known as the cradle of democracy and, as such, is considered to have been based on equality among its people. However, historical records reveal a different story, and a closer look suggests that gender inequality was as dominant as class inequality. William Sanger writes that around the fifth century BCE, “women were educated for the sole purpose of bearing robust children” (45). In his book *History of prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects throughout the World* published in 1859, he discusses the development of prostitution throughout history and points out the roles these women had in various cultures. Going back to Ancient Greece, he adds that there were four classes of prostitutes, the highest ranked one being a hetaira. They were known as “kept women” who lived in the best parts of the city and had a significant influence “over the manners and even the politics of the state” (46). Such as they were, they excited admiration from other females, and Sanger also claims their position in society was of such dominance “that virtuous females were entirely thrown into the shade, and it must have been quite possible for a chaste Athenian girl, endowed with ambition, to look up to them, and covet their splendid infamy” (53). That scenario sounds plausible, given that Athenian matrons had to stay at home; they were not allowed to be present at theaters or games and “received no education, and could not share the elevated thoughts or ideas of her husband” (53). Unlike such chaste and virtuous women, only a hetaira

Saw the plays of Alexander and Aristophanes; they alone had the entrée of the studio of Phidias and Apelles; they alone heard Socrates reason, and discussed

politics with Pericles; they alone shared in the intellectual movement of Greece....None but they mingled in the assemblages of great men at the Pnyx or the Stoa. None but they could gather round them of an evening the choicest spirits of the day, and elicit, in the freedom of unrestrained inter course, wit and wisdom, flashing fancy and burning eloquence. (Sanger 54-55)

The elevated status the hetaira enjoyed in Ancient Greece remained prevalent for over a millennium, and its legacy can be found in the treatment seventeenth-century British prostitutes received.

One of the most famous courtesans of that time was Nell Gwyn, a mistress to King Charles II. An actress by profession, she soon fulfilled the dream of the Restoration era—a successful woman who made her way from rags to royalty. A high-class courtesan, Gwyn enjoyed the admiration and love of the London public and among the common people was popularized as the Protestant Mistress, in contrast to Mademoiselle de Querouaille, or Mrs. Carwell, who was known as the Catholic Mistress.

Their trade was being professional mistresses, and as such they were openly accepted by the public and even appreciated in society. Gwyn was a talented actress, but relying solely on that profession would not grant her a prominent position in society. It is the association with powerful men that enabled women such as Gwyn to become acquainted with the gentry. Additionally, such women would get an opportunity to enter dialogues with men of intellect. In his book *Nell Gwyn*, Charles Beauclerk, who is one of the direct descendants of Gwyn's union with King Charles II, discloses many interesting encounters Gwyn had with men of power. He claims that they perceived her wit to be “sharp but earthly, full of homely metaphors that brought pretensions crashing to the ground” (246). Like a Greek hetaria, a British high-class prostitute of

seventeenth-century England enjoyed the company of some of the most prominent intellectuals and achieved what was rarely possible for the majority of women of her time—to educate herself and converse almost as an equal with men of power. Additionally, this trade enabled her to provide for herself a life of certain comfort and luxury. This tradition of the successful high-class prostitute continued into nineteenth-century England.

Although Victorian society was not as openly accepting of prostitution as the previous centuries might have been, the fact that the trade persevered implied that professional prostitution was almost a necessary companion to a functioning society. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there were different classes of prostitutes, and based on their ranking within that subculture, they professionally interacted with men of diverse social standings. The high-class prostitute was a Victorian replica of Ancient Greek's hetaria, and as such had the opportunity to improve those aspects of her life that were generally kept under restraint because of the prevailing gender inequality.

Unlike the courtesans, regular women of nineteenth-century England had to fit into prescribed roles. Neither Queen Victoria, the most powerful female in the country, nor her daughter were exceptions to these rules. While she supported the founding of a women's college in 1847, she wholeheartedly opposed the idea that women should be given the right to vote, calling the women's suffrage movement a “mad folly.” The Queen's perception of marriage and a woman's role within a family was based around the idea of female sacrifice. Her convictions about marriage dynamics could be clearly understood from the letter she sent in 1858 to her recently married daughter, in which she advised that

There is a great happiness . . . in devoting oneself to another who is worthy of one's affection; still, men are very selfish and the woman's devotion is always one

of submission which makes our poor sex so very unenviable. This you will feel hereafter—I know; though it cannot be otherwise as God has willed so. (qtd. in Greenblatt 1581)

The fact was that Victoria, who as Queen was above any other person of power in the kingdom, believed that the gender inequality was God-given and impossible to change. This conviction demonstrated to what extent prejudicial ideologies could influence a society.

The position women had in Victorian society and in their own marriages was accepted as natural and inevitable and, therefore, impossible to change. However, not everyone agreed with such a demeaning notion. In 1888, Mona Caird, a feminist writer, concluded that “the institution of marriage was socially constructed and had a specific history: far from being a relationship ordained by God, marriage was an association that could and ought to be reinvented to promote freedom and equality for both partners” (1582). Instead of agreeing to the accepted patterns of female behavior, Caird and many other feminist authors challenged them. Caird's views of married life are idealistic for that time, and she was obviously aware of that fact. Greenblatt mentions that she called for “a gradual alteration of opinion which will rebuild [established institutions] from the very foundation,” (Greenblatt 1582) since she understood that in order for such an alteration to occur, the entire system had to undergo a piecemeal change.

The truth of the matter was that those same “established institutions” left many women discontented. The scientific fact that a brain of a man on average weighed three and a half pounds, while a woman's was around two pounds eleven ounces, was used as a valid argument to conclude that all women possessed a shallower intellectual capacity. This presupposition widened the gap between the genders, intensifying the inequality that had already existed and limiting the type of education women were expected to receive. Middle and high-class women

without a profession soon became bored with the lives they were prescribed to live. Those who were rich enough to afford maids, governesses and household servants literally had nothing to do but entertain their equally, if not more affluent, acquaintances. They were supposed to be the idealized versions of themselves, real life angels in the house that mirror Coventry Patmore's character of Honoria from his wildly successful poem "The Angel in the House." According to him, a woman's "affecting majesty" (55) should be "meek, so far unlike our own" (56), concluding that submissiveness, if not innate to women, had to be taught to them.

Yet it was a small percentage of women who had the time to perfect their roles as angels. The great majority of English women had to earn their living, and the jobs available were commonly arduous and low paying. Many worked in factories for fourteen to sixteen hours a day, six days a week, laboring in poor conditions and dangerous environments. Some even accepted jobs in coal mines and the steel industry in order to avoid having to go to the dreadful workhouses. These places were feared because of the way government set them up—everyone, female or male, young or old, had to work extremely hard in order to keep that roof over their head, an oftentimes, children would be "lent" to work in factories and mines. Other women found employment as servant girls or governesses, or, if they were skilled, they could take up a trade and perhaps work as seamstresses. Then there were those who decided to venture into a different profession and either earn their living or supplement it by working as prostitutes. Greenblatt contends that the very existence of such a "'Great Social Evil,' as the Victorians regarded it . . . [was] one indication that the 'angel in the house' was not always able to exert her moralizing influence on her mate or her male children" (1582). In other words, these "angels in the house" were unable to keep the men of their households away from the stigmatized immorality of England's sex-workers. It came as no surprise, given that women did not have any

legal power within the society, that they felt inferior to men because they were treated in such a manner. Victorian women were acutely aware of the male power system and its values, which caused them to constantly keep themselves and their sisters “in check.” Unlike these more complicated women, nineteenth-century prostitutes acquiesced less to such norms, and their overt rebellion was led by unrepentant, high-class courtesans who did not shy away from exposing the hypocrisies of that patriarchal society.

Augusta Webster and the Failure of Nineteenth-Century Female Education

Augusta Webster creates just such a prostitute, a woman who does not wallow in repentance but openly unmask one of the sources for her growing profession—the failures of institutionalized education which deprived the majority of women of the opportunity to exercise their intellect and utilize that education to provide for themselves. In her dramatic monologue “A Castaway,” Webster exposes the popularized attitudes towards women and forces the reader to consider the complexity of the situation in which women found themselves and the obstacles they encountered based solely on gender. Webster published this poem in 1870 as a part of her collection of poems entitled *Portraits*, and to this day “A Castaway” remains one of the few works of poetry that without pretense reveals the hypocritical treatment of professional prostitutes and at the same time discredits the established social and cultural stereotypes about Victorian sex-workers. Spoken from the point of view of an unrepentant prostitute, this poem is a confession of a culturally-segregated tradeswoman who candidly points to the failing system of education that discriminates against women and deliberately denies them the right to pursue broader knowledge.

Augusta Webster was one of the most politically active female writers of the Victorian era. Her earliest works were published under the pseudonym “Cecil Home,” and under her own

name appeared *Dramatic Studies* (1866), *A Woman Sold and Other Poems* (1867), and *Portraits* (1870). She was not only a poet, but also worked as a translator, suffragist, journalist, and reviewer for the prominent literary journal the *Athenaeum* between 1884-1894. She served twice on the London School Board for the Chelsea district, first from 1879 to 1882 and then from 1885 to 1888. At that time this organization was the only education provider for the County of London, and its governing board was filled with some of the most prominent intellectuals of the day. Through her work for the London School Board, Webster became personally involved in providing education for the entire population of Wales and England. The experience gathered in those years helped her understand how grave the need for the improvement of institutionalized education had become. This theme would underlie her collection of essays *A Housewife's Opinion* as well as many of her poems.

Augusta Webster grew up in a time when women were excluded from the public spheres and governmental institutions, and it was assumed they had no use for classical education. While the study of Greek language became very popular for many Victorians, and although English translations were widely available, the knowledge of Greek remained for the most part a privilege of men. Webster challenged these norms as she expressed the desire to overcome the limitations imposed on her gender and acquire the knowledge necessary to understand the intricate ways in which classical literature worked to accelerate social change. For Webster, the ability to read these works in the original language meant that she would be able to access the information that was reserved for middle-class and high-class men of her time and which was used to train them for political and social leadership. The translations of Greek texts that were readily available were rather laudatory and mostly focused on the praise of societal characteristics that mirrored the Victorian cultural values. However, around mid-century the

educational system that had determined that the study of Greek was essentially a masculine subject began to change. As Shanyn Fiske notes,

In 1863, Cambridge extended a modified version of its Local Examinations to girls; in 1869 and 1871 the first women's colleges (Girton and Newnham) opened at Cambridge, in 1878, the University of London permitted women to sit examinations; and in 1882, it became the first university to grant degrees to women. (473)

This change was welcomed by Webster, although she understood that even under those "loose" terms education of this kind still remained inaccessible for the majority of women who were not of the middle or upper high class.

Nevertheless, she appreciated the newly available opportunities, because she saw them as a stepping stone in the process of improving female education. In 1879 she made this clear in her book of essays, *A Housewife's Opinion*:

This change will bring another, even greater; a girl's time will be considered to have some value . . . Those who have noted the aimlessness and drifting and fussy futility of the days of most women in the classes where women have their maintenance provided for them and are understood never to be too busy over one thing to do another, as most of us must have noted, can easily see that this higher appreciation by others and by herself of the value of her time would in itself be an education to a girl. (96)

She believed the nation should stop fearing educated women, and instead learn how to better appreciate their value and intellectual capacity. Webster wrote extensively on this subject and urged the public to understand that a university education would not masculinize and

denaturalize women, thus robbing the country of its marriageable girls. This was one of the claims by the opponents of the reforms for women's education in the British Empire.

Webster's approach to gender issues echoes some of the ideas proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft at the end of the eighteenth century. Both suggest that men should not fear educated women, for they would make satisfactory intellectual companions. Throughout her *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft asserts that conventionally-educated women in England are like “alluring mistresses” rather than “affectionate wives” and rational mothers” (7). According to her, the type of education for women that “stresses the wisdom of pleasing men results in superficially respectable young women more like their ‘fallen’ sisters than any ‘virtuous’ ideal” (qtd. in Eberle 34). Wollstonecraft continues her argument by suggesting that “Till more understanding preponderates in society, there will ever be a want of heart and taste, and the harlot's ‘rouge’ will supply the place of that celestial suffusion which only virtuous affections can give to the face” (Wollstonecraft 165). The underlying metaphorical structure of the *Vindication* seems consistently to return to the idea of “good” and “bad” women, and on multiple occasions she blurs the lines of distinction between the two. Seemingly “virtuous” English women are equated with “a series of sexually suspect analogs: kept women, slaves, prostitutes, and harem women” (41). It seems that for Wollstonecraft the manner in which the gender differences are set in England positions all women as prostitutes. Even a blush becomes a symbol of self-conscious and predatory behavior of marketable sexuality rather than a sign of “true” virtue. She was aware that the majority of women were deprived of the profitable employment that would allow respectable economic independence and thus had to resort to what the culture had taught them—to exalt in their statuses as sexual objects. If a woman should dedicate herself to continually exciting pleasure in her man, whether that of the heart or the body, then how can we tell between

the morality of a wife and a prostitute—they both expect some kind of compensation for their efforts.

Augusta Webster and “A Castaway”

In her most famous poem, “A Castaway,” Webster presents her attitudes toward the kind of education that trains women to be nothing more than mere entertainers and dowdy housekeepers. Through the character of Eulalie, a verbose courtesan who has no misgivings about the nature of her profession, Webster publicly declares that there is something wrong with a society in which a high-class prostitute has more ownership over her body and intellect than almost any other female in the country. The theme of inadequate education for women is given an interesting perspective in this poem. In a sarcastic tone Eulalie reads through her diary, revealing that her life once revolved around activities such as the following:

. . . “Studied French an hour,”
“Read Modern History,” “Trimmed up my grey hat,”
“Darned stockings,” “Tatted,” “Practised my new song,”
“Went to the daily service,” “Took Bess soup,”
“Went out to tea.” Poor simple diary!
and did I write it? Was I this good girl,
this budding colourless young rose of home?
did I so live content in such a life. (2-9)

From the opening of the poem, Webster compares the prescribed notions of female “goodness” with emptiness—Eulalie as a good girl resembles a colorless rose. The duties listed in her diary reveal that the education she received from such an early age prepared her only for a successful completion of domestic duties and activities that were considered appropriate for an aspiring

angel in the house. By opening the poem with these lines, Webster suggests to the reader that perhaps the root of the Great Social Evil is not to be found in women's inherent lack of morality, but instead in the forced depravity of a social system that would allow women to achieve economic security that does not originate in their having to cash in on the pleasures they incite in men.

This poem is equally reminiscent of some of the ideas put forward by Mary Wollstonecraft. Even though she lived almost a century earlier, the problems with education designed for women were of great importance to her, claiming that

Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength, which leads them to play off those contemptible infantine airs the undermine esteem even whilst they excite desire. (112)

The emphasis that was placed upon female virtue and a woman's inherent sensitivity of the body and the mind predetermined how the society would perceive her abilities. A woman was expected to be chaste and submissive and not trouble her mind with knowledge that was mostly reserved for men. The most common belief about females in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that their brains, as noted earlier, were physically smaller and therefore possessed less capacity for intellectual thinking. Mary Wollstonecraft offers a counterargument for this, suggesting that if the society would

Let men become more chaste and modest, and if women do not grow wiser in the same ration, it will be clear that they have weaker understanding. Many individuals have more sense than their male relatives; and, as nothing

preponderates where there is a constant struggle for an equilibrium, without it has naturally more gravity, some women govern their husbands without degrading themselves, because intellect will always govern. (11)

However, the intellect is not always allowed to govern. What society deems morally acceptable behavior she sees as being degrading to women and vice versa—the logical analogy being that what is culturally expected to be degrading to females might actually hold more morality for them than previously believed. In other words, Wollstonecraft's primary concern is female education; in her writings she seeks to change her reader's attitudes about conventionally accepted sexual behavior. Additionally, she attempts to alter their perception of sexually transgressive women and demonstrate how they compare to a “proper” lady.

While the role of a wife is considered the highest achievement of female power, both Wollstonecraft and Webster reject that the main ambition in life for women is establishing a temporarily binding contract with a man. Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, Webster dramatically portrays this idea in Eulalie, the unrepentant prostitute, revealing that

Then for ambition, (was there ever life
that could forgo that?) to improve my mind
and know French better and sing harder songs;
for gaiety, to go, in my best white
well washed and starched and freshened with new bows,
and take tea out to meet the clergyman. (15-21)

When offered no other socially acceptable way to break free from the constraints of patriarchy, Eulalie has to step into a “forbidden” world in order to escape the mind-numbing life she is forced to live. Her value as a human being is based on her ability to utilize her body and talent to

please those who are in power. It is significant that Webster chooses to portray Eulalie as a middle-class girl and not as a child of the streets. Even as a prostitute, she is quite prosperous and economically independent. This situation allows Webster to criticize the lack of education and vocational training given to middle-class girls and concludes that any other job Eulalie got would not provide financial support nearly as well.

Despite her higher social background, Eulalie legally has no other possession but her own self, and she confesses that this beauty and sexual allure is

the dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all,
Let me make much of it: is it not this,
This beauty, my own curse at once and tool
To snare men's souls, (I know what the good say
Of beauty in such creatures) is it not this
That makes me feel myself a woman still
With still some little pride, some little. (38-44)

Eulalie is aware that those outside her subculture perceive her as a woman who has nothing on which to pride herself. However, her argument is the fact that as a woman she is free to live life under her own terms, which creates at least some sense of pride and independence. There were not many women in nineteenth-century England who could assert a similar claim. Once married, a woman would lose her existence as a legal entity, as everything she had, including her wages, became the property of the husband, who become the sole representative of their union.

Therefore, Eulalie does not regret her choice of profession and suggests that a society that places such a value on female appearance rather than female intellectual capabilities denies women the opportunity to be employed in more remunerative positions. Well-paid jobs are reserved for

educated men, and she, as a gifted entertainer and trained pleaser of men, can easily slip into the profession of a high-class prostitute. For years society prepared her for a life of pleasing a man who might but probably would not remain faithful to her. If there were not men ready to transgress outside their marriage union, there would not be women like Eulalie to keep the profession alive.

Though currently employed as a prostitute, Eulalie received the “training” of a “proper” woman, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Having gone through the process herself, she offers an honest insight into the hypocritical treatment she receives not only from men, but also from other women. Instead of understanding her position and desire to be in charge of herself, some women, brainwashed from the ability to think critically, could not comprehend her actions. To them, Eulalie reproaches

Oh! those shrill carping virtues, safely housed
from reach of even a smile that should put red
on a decorous cheek, who rail at us
with such a spiteful scorn and rancourousness
(which maybe is half envy at the heart),
and boast themselves so measurelessly good
and us so measurelessly unlike them. (113-119)

The irony is that it is Eulalie who understands there is not much difference between the two of them, the angel in the house and the sinner in the alley, except for the fact that she possesses the ability to understand the ways in which society functions. So much attention and time is invested in educating women on how to appear virtuous to men and how to behave in order to snag a better prey that they forget the essential meaning of being moral.

The hypocrisy of the Victorian system was omnipresent in the society's adamant denial of sex work as a legitimate line of business. Even some of Webster's contemporaries might agree with Eulalie that there are other professions that deserve more harsh judgment than hers. For instance, she condemns the well-educated men, "Our lawyers, who with noble eloquence and virtuous outbursts lie to hang a man" (81-82) and calls upon "Our preachers, gloating on your future hell for not believing what they doubt themselves" (84-85). Portrayed against the backdrop of proposed measures of morality, Eulalie reveals that her profession is used as a scapegoat that will avert the attention from the real transgressors in the Victorian society. She continues by disclosing that "Our journalists, whose business is to fib and juggle truths and falsehoods to and fro"(89-91) remain untouched or un-despised by society and do not have to endure being "called half a dozen dainty names, and none dainty enough to serve the turn and hide the one coarse English worst that lurks beneath" (63-65). Believing herself to be a woman of a specific trade, she does not shy away from comparing her profession to that of a tradesmen, "who must keep unspotted names and cheat the least like stealing that they can" (90-91), but adamantly acknowledges the difference in the treatment the two of them, the tradesmen and the professional prostitute, receive.

Eulalie also understands the manner in which her profession is perceived and mockingly refers to those activists who are always searching for the wrongdoings and incessantly attempting to find something or someone to condemn. She claims

Well, well, I know the wise ones talk and talk:

"Here's the cause, here's the cure:" "No, here it is, and here:"

And find society to blame, or law,

The Church, the men, the women, too few schools,

Too many schools, too much, too little taught:

Somewhere or somehow someone is to blame. (289-294)

In this part of the poem, Webster addresses the issue of female education that we have been tracing in this chapter, which is often blamed for women's behavior. On the one hand, there are men complaining about the insipidness of their wives and female companions, believing them to be so silly that they will never take them seriously. “Too little taught” (293) is a problem, as it creates a rift between the spouses, particularly when one partner is perceived as inherently lacking the ability to rise up to the intellectual level of the other. On the other hand, when “too much” is taught, it challenges the established system, as the Victorians maintained certain expectations from women—going beneath the expected level is not welcomed, but desiring and even daring to rise above what is expected for one’s gender is received with outright negativity. As Greenblatt notes in his overview of the “Woman Question,” in the nineteenth century it was believed that a woman

who tried to cultivate her intellect beyond drawing-room accomplishments was violating the order of Nature and of religious tradition. Woman was to be valued, instead, for other qualities considered especially characteristic of her sex: tenderness of understanding, unworldliness and innocence, domestic affection, and, in various degrees, submissiveness. (1581)

The Victorians did not only deliberately force their women to reduce their mental and physical capabilities to mere character traits, but they also intentionally discouraged them from venturing into higher education, equating it with an abomination against religion and nature.

In a sarcastic tone that is reminiscent of the famous Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathan Swift, Eulalie proposes a way in which the Victorians can easily, and once and for all, settle the

infamous “Woman Question.” She begins by locating the cause of this problem:

But I say all the fault's with God himself

Who puts too many women in the world.

We ought to die off reasonable and leave

As many as the men want, none to waste.

Here's the cause; the woman's superfluity: (295-299)

Eulalie does not stop there, as she must offer a valid and reasonable solution for the nuisance women create. Her proposition regards women as mere possessions that can easily and without remorse be deposed of. This suggestion mirrors the generalized perception nineteenth-century patriarchy had of its female population. She continues, adding,

And for the cure, why, if it were the law,

Say, every year, in due percentages,

Balancing them with males as the times need,

To kill off female infants, 'twould make room;

And some of us would not have lost too much,

Losing life ere we know what it *can* mean. (300-305)

Since the Victorians regarded women as beings who were on a slightly lower level than men, it comes as no surprise that Webster would resort to this dramatic comparison. For Eulalie, life is not just the state of not being dead, and we learn that from her own words. When she says “losing life,” she does not simply mean becoming physically dead. If anything, she honestly believes that dying before they can truly experience life in nineteenth-century England would be a blessing for women rather than a curse. Eulalie knows what life “*can* mean,” referring to the perpetual struggle with the duplicitous social system she is in, not only as a prostitute but, more

significantly, as a woman.

Through the voice of an unrepentant, high-class prostitute, Webster challenges the reformist ideas and the alleged desires of Victorian women. Without fear, Webster states that there are more “appalling conditions” for women than prostitution and that what is truly appalling is the nineteenth-century system that created the conditions that led to such widespread prostitution in Victorian England. The character of Eulalie understands that maybe the patriarchy will not provide her with the opportunity to better herself through education and lucrative employment, but it will most certainly provide her with customers enthusiastically compensating her adequately for the skills she has perfected through her profession. Instead of attempting to portray Eulalie as a victim, Webster opts instead to present her as an expert critic of a system that deliberately denies equality in education based on gender. She boldly stands behind her belief that the lack of proper education is one of the reasons why so many women decided to turn to prostitution as a profession of choice or necessity. For Eulalie, no other occupation would be so lucrative, and at the same time allow her to remain an independent contractor. In terms of the supply and demand model, observed solely through the lens of economic standing, Victorian high-class courtesans' financial achievements went beyond what their limited educational training would permit them.

CHAPTER 4

“YOU, WHO KNEW WHAT THING WOULD BE, HAVE WROUGHT THIS EVIL UNTO ME”: THE REAL UNMENTIONABLE OF THE GREAT SOCIAL EVIL—THE MALE CLIENT

The Contagious Diseases Acts

The previous chapters have established the fact that in the eyes of the Victorian public prostitution stood as one of the greatest evils ever to befall their country. However, since so many men engaged their services, the fear of an outbreak of sexually transmitted diseases began to spread throughout the empire. With the goal of protecting men from contracting a venereal disease, the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864. Certain editions and alterations were made in 1866 and 1869, and the Acts remained law until 1886, when they were finally repealed. However, during the twenty years of their enforcement, the Contagious Diseases Acts managed to arouse revolt in people who believed their implementation was oppressive to the female population of England.

One of the major controversial issues regarding the implementation of the Acts was the time at which they were passed. From a European standpoint, their introduction into the legal system of the United Kingdom came significantly late. Prostitution was not a product of the nineteenth century—as a profession it had been practiced in England for centuries. Victorian prostitutes only continued the tradition of their predecessors and attempted to maintain its laissez-faire tradition. However, the second half of the nineteenth century brought about a drastic change in the way the legal system “tolerated” prostitution. This profession dominated the attention from the state, the church, medical professionals, feminists, and others. All of them proposed different solutions to successfully control it and ultimately end it. This growing anxiety that prostitutes could infect the respectable world and destroy marriages, the home and the

family, led to the attempts to prevent and suppress prostitution.

The proposed reasoning behind passing the Contagious Diseases Acts was to make paid sex safe for the men enlisted in the armed services, yet there seemed to have been ulterior motives that led to their enactment. Military historians and other parties who supported the passing of these Acts perceived them to be a logical response to an urgent social problem. However, behind this practical medical goal lies the fact that from the very beginning the Acts were weighed down by moral and ideological presumptions. As Paul McHugh explains in *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform*, consequential changes to the Bill resulted in the specific definition of the prostitute disappearing in the process. A clause was added that allowed women to avoid a public appearance before the court if suspected of having a venereal disease, but they would have to voluntarily submit themselves to physical examinations. It was this particular clause that would, according to McHugh, become the “cornerstone of the system” (37).

As explained in Chapter 2, the Victorians did not decide on a specific description of a prostitute; by keeping the definition vague and general, the police employed to enforce the Acts had almost unrestricted powers. According to the Contagious Diseases Acts, a special policeman in plain clothes would identify a woman to be a “common prostitute” and then subject her to a fortnightly physical examination. On one hand, those women believed to be prostitutes were pressured into enduring these examinations while, on the other hand, the same law was not enforced on the enlisted men to have genital examinations, even though they were the clients. Therefore, any effectiveness of the medical measures that might have been achieved by these Acts was undermined from the very start by this duplicitous treatment.

In *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Judith Walkowitz suggests that there was more to the Contagious Diseases Acts than mere concern for the physical welfare of the people. She

proposes that the underlying intent behind their passing was “a new enthusiasm for the state intervention into the lives of the unrespectable poor” (3). Prostitutes were almost always perceived as outcasts of the society, and the enlisted men, as opposed to non-enlisted clients, were not treated better in any way. While the former served for the illicit pleasures of middle and high-class Victorian males, the latter was a source of cheap labor. This focus on the social underworld reveals some of the social fears and anxieties that troubled nineteenth-century British society. They equated the images of filth and contagion with the members of the lower classes, which they would refer to as the “Great Unwashed.”

Walkowitz argues that the discrepancies between the poor and the middle-class were such that it seemed as if they formed “Two Nations” (4)—her belief is that such a class division “assumed heightened scatological significance in a society where the poor seemed to be living in their own excrement, and where the first programmatic attempt to deal with urban social problems was in the realm of sanitary engineering” (4). However, that attempt was guided by hypocritical ideology; and although in its conceptualized state it seemed to be the most rational solution, in practice it became a means of exercising control over the “uncontrollable” women. The Victorian prostitutes of all ranking were thus reduced to symbolic conduits of disease by the reputable people of the British Empire.

This perception of prostitutes as disgraced and powerless, while at the same time threatening and potentially treacherous, is reflected in the Contagious Diseases Acts. These legal notions were utilized to restrain female sexuality and to obfuscate the symbolical representation of sexual and economic exploitation executed under industrial capitalism. By exerting control over sexuality, the Acts reinforced the extant class and gender differences. Instead of leaving sex within the domain of personal privacy, the society brought sexuality into the spotlight of public

concern. By publicizing the private, they enforced the control over the growing scope of human activity, particularly in regard to the members of the lower classes. Yet the primary focus in extramarital sexual liaisons remained on the sexualized body of a prostitute, not on the male client. The acts did not specify the interest in abolishing sexual activities outside marriage, but instead they were employed to oversee such behavior in order to control and manipulate the unrespectable poor. Directing the attention to medically supervise the female body, the police working under the acts created “an outcast class of 'sexually deviant' females, forcing prostitutes to acknowledge their status as 'public' women and destroying their private association with the general community of the laboring poor” (Walkowitz 5). Additionally, the Acts strictly defined female and male sexuality as two disparate notions that should be socially and medically treated in different manners.

The Contagious Diseases Acts institutionalized the obsessive desire of the Victorians to identify and categorize female sexual behavior. When supported by the Acts, this fixation on sexual reputation made women vulnerable not only to social ostracism, but also to the two pillars of male dominance; the law and medicine. The Royal Commission of 1871 defended the duplicitous treatment of women and men believed to have a venereal disease by claiming that

[W]e may have at once disposed of any recommendation founded on the principle of putting both parties to the sin of fornication on the same footing by the obvious but not less conclusive reply that there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse. (McHugh 24)

The double standard applied to prostitutes is not reflected only in drastically diverse attention

paid to nineteenth-century female sex-workers and their male clients. This dichotomous representation defined Victorian women as either “pure” and thus morally and ethically acceptable, or as “contagious” and by default innately corrupted and socially ostracized.

It is this hypocritical predicament of the Victorian prostitute that I will discuss while exploring the portrayal of the male client in nineteenth-century British poetry. By relying on the Contagious Diseases Acts repeal campaigns and the manner in which they tackled the government's atrocious attempts to dominate the female body, I will reveal the true unmentionables of the Victorian society—the men who hypocritically enjoyed taking advantage of professional prostitution while simultaneously desiring to exert absolute control over such an “unrestrained” profession. Still, they remained untouched by the ostracizing stigma that was so easily placed on the prostitute, thus creating an atmosphere of unequal responsibility for one's deliberate actions.

Amy Levy and the Campaign to Repeal Contagious Diseases Acts

Amy Levy was born to a middle-class Anglo-Jewish family and spent most of her life in London's Bloomsbury. Just like Augusta Webster, Levy expressed the desire to learn Greek and Latin early in her life. Despite the limitations imposed on her gender, she succeeded in fulfilling that wish, and even as a teenager was able to fluently read several languages. One of her earliest works, “Xantippe,” written as a defense of Socrates' wife, was published in 1880 in the *Dublin University Magazine*. Although only nineteen at the time, Levy was quite sophisticated, and her work attracted the attention of some of the most important writers of her time. In *Slum Travelers*, Ellen Ross mentions of Levy that

Oscar Wilde warmly apprised her talent and achievements, citing “Xantippe” for its qualities of sincerity, directness and melancholy, and her novel *Reuben Sachs*

for its directness, its uncompromising truths, its depth of feeling, and, above all, its absence of any single superfluous word. (117)

Her contribution to the literary output of Victorian writing is considerable, if not for the number of her published works, then most definitely for the quality of her writing and the manner in which she explored some of the issues her gender struggled with on daily basis in patriarchally dominated Victorian England.

Although she reached significant prominence during her lifetime, Amy Levy is one of those nineteenth-century British female authors who cannot be found today in modern mainstream anthologies. The collection of her works includes three novels, three volumes of poetry, and numerous short stories and works of literary criticism, yet only a few of her poems have managed to reach a contemporary audience. After “Xantippe,” the poem “Magdalen” received the most attention from the critics, probably because it explores one of the burning problems of nineteenth-century England—the Great Social Evil. Levy's interpretation of prostitution is somewhat different from Hardy's or Webster's, as she focuses on uncovering the true secret of nineteenth-century British society, the socially protected and justified male client.

Levy was well aware of the problems Victorian prostitutes had to face on a daily basis. Despite the fact that she was born to a relatively affluent middle-class family, her work with the Women's Protective and Provident League led her to become acquainted with the female workers, as well as with the working girls of London. As Ross notes, she thought of herself as “a child of the city, with an “urban Muse” whose “place was among the struggling crown of dwellers in cities” (117). A feminist at heart, she believed that women's problems came from the socially enabled patriarchal mistreatment of the “weaker” sex. Therefore, in her poetry she attempts to bring to light the female desire for equality of treatment, both in terms of education

as well as personal freedom. Her view of prostitutes is colored with pity to a certain degree. She acknowledges the limitations imposed on her gender and does not attempt to justify a prostitute's choice of profession. Instead, she makes an effort to expose the duplicity of the treatment prostitutes and their clients received.

By creating a fictional character such as her Magdalen, Levy openly unmask the failures of the Contagious Diseases Acts campaigns. While the men of authority mercilessly humiliated any woman suspected of being a sex worker, they at the same time kept their distance from the other obvious participant in such a profession. The government's rejection to examine and to regulate the behavior of men who more or less regularly paid visits to prostitutes meant that these women were legally left unprotected from contracting a venereal disease. Nineteenth-century British prostitutes might have been a source of the widespread outbreak of venereal disease, but they were not alone in that act. The decision to treat the source of a disease, while simultaneously turning a blind eye to the obvious carrier, reveals that the Contagious Diseases Acts were created with a goal of creating more legal room to control the otherwise "intractable" members of society.

Such hypocritical governmental treatment of women was not only challenged by Levy; numerous activists protested against such an improper and offensive behavior, and Josephine Butler stood at the front of the repeal campaigns. Interestingly, Butler was middle-class, just like Levy, and as such was not personally targeted by the Acts. Along with other feminists, Butler joined the "radical workingmen and middle-class nonconformists to oppose the regulation of prostitution" (Walkowitz 90) in their fight to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. She played the crucial role in this movement, and her actions inspired hundreds of women to join the protests. Her siding with prostitutes and fallen women came from her belief that there should be no secrets

on sexual questions.

By openly exposing the secretive acts of men, Butler and other socially “respectable” women intentionally asserted themselves into the public discussion on sexuality. In *City of Dreadful Delight*, Walkowitz emphasizes that Butler “gave radical meaning to the melodramatic narrative of sexual danger by vindicating female activism, by dignifying the figure of the suffering fallen woman, and by inserting herself as a heroine/victim” (92). Additionally, Butler attempted to change the manner in which society perceived prostitutes and other ostracized, female members of the nineteenth-century class system. Her idea was to

deploy the melodramatic convention of suffering womanhood to invert the prevailing view of 'fallen women' as pollutants for men; instead she defended them as victims of male pollution, as women who had been invaded by men's bodies, men's laws, and by that steel penis, the speculum. (Walkowitz 92)

Her repeal campaign spread like wildfire, and she easily gained support from other middle-class women who boldly stood up against the deliberate oppression of the British working girls.

The main concern for both Levy and Butler was the fact that men were left untouched by these Acts that were supposedly designed to prevent the spread of the deadly disease and ensure that prostitutes and, particularly, their clients, were not exposed to any health risks.

Unfortunately, the implementation of those laws was unscrupulous and humiliating to any female forced to undergo the invasive internal examination. If working girls were diagnosed with a venereal disease, they would be sent to a hospital, where, in most cases, they would be left to die. Such is the destiny of Levy's Magdalen, who seems to be looking favorably at death, as it will provide her with the desired escape from the hell where patriarchy and the male client have placed her. In the words of this unremorseful prostitute the reader can recognize the ideas put

forward by Butler—on her death bed, the disease-ridden Magdalen cannot help but point to the source of her downfall, the man who deliberately destroyed her life. By employing a dying prostitute as her speaker, Levy manages to attain the credibility of the accusation against the hypocrisy of the patriarchy that was more concerned with the preservation of a female “virtue” than a female life.

Through an intentional omission of the male client, the publicly presented story of a prostitute served to scare women into remaining submissive to the governing masculinity. Under the feigned “protection” of such a system, women would remain sheltered from the corrupting influence of the outside world. What the gender in power neglected to mention was the fact that they were the source of the corruption. They were not only enabling prostitution and participating in the spread of venereal diseases, but they intentionally disregarded treating infected men. If a prostitute was the origin of the infection, then her clients were the carriers who brought the disease to their “respectable” homes, thus contaminating the family “hearth.” Therefore, by enforcing a double standard in treatment of professional prostitutes and their potentially infectious clients, the governing system of Victorian England contributed to the spread of the venereal disease.

Amy Levy and “Magdalen”

Levy's interest in the mistreatment of prostitutes may not have resulted in numerous works being written on that topic, but the essence of her opinion is condensed in her dramatic monologue “Magdalen.” Alone and dying in a hostile environment, this impenitent prostitute reflects on her life and actions that have brought her to this state. From her story we learn that it was through the “unwedded” involvement with a man who infected her with venereal disease that she is now in a hospital, waiting on death as a welcomed liberator from a life of injustice.

Although she never explicitly confesses her profession, by employing the definitions provided by two medical professionals, William Tait and William Acton, Levy's Magdalen conforms to the description of a Victorian prostitute. Despite the fact that her situation resembles the literary fallen woman, the words that open her confession set her apart from that subclass of women. By stating that "all things I can endure" (l. 1), this Magdalen rejects any form of repentance for her behavior and choice of profession. Instead, she assumes her role as unrepentant prostitute, renouncing socially-imposed morality.

Her social position was governed by the gender and the class she belonged to. As a female in nineteenth-century England, this prostitute was accustomed to being ostracized from "respectable" society. Such societal stratification was further enforced by the Contagious Diseases Acts which attempted to exert ultimate control over a female body. After the passing of the Acts, the law prescribed a nine-month confinement in a hospital, with moral and religious instructions added to the medical treatment for a prostitute who proved to have a venereal disease. It is the hypocrisy of that moral teaching that Levy condemns in her poem, as such morality suggests that the full blame must be placed on the figure of the prostitute. Her Magdalen is surrounded by

The bare, blank room where is no sun;

The parcelled hours; the pallet hard;

The dreary faces here within;

The outer women's cold regard;

The Pastor's iterated 'sin'; (ll. 2-6)

Such an environment might be unpleasant to her, but she opts to persevere and bear up against the unjust situation. Even the reproach she finds in the eyes and the words of the people who are

around her can no longer produce a response in her. She is aware that the disease cannot be cured, and she has accepted the fact that imminent death is upon her. Therefore, the hospital and the people who surround her do not affect her, despite their attempts to impose their biased opinions upon her.

The fact that she is placed in a hospital and diagnosed with a venereal disease suggests that she has already undergone the internal examination prescribed by the Contagious Diseases Acts. Levy does not ponder the procedure itself, but from the writings of numerous doctors and feminist critics we can understand how invasive this treatment was. In Walkowitz's interpretation, this examination became an

... instrumental rape of registered women [which] not only epitomized the villainous conspiracy of men, but it rendered that conspiracy even more sinister and perverse. In the name of medical science, it legitimated a cruel and unnatural sexual violation, one that inflicted pain and sexual mutilation on women. (92)

There were many recorded accounts of women who were forced to undergo this procedure, and these accounts were used by the campaigners determined to revoke the Contagious Diseases Acts. There is evidence that some of the repeal campaigners, such as Josephine Butler, utilized such detailed reports in their repeal propagandas:

It is awful work; the attitude they push us into first is so disgusting and so painful, and then these monstrous instruments and they pull them out and push them in, and they turn and twist them about; and if you cry out they stifle you. (Jordan 114)

It was just such a treatment that Levy's Magdalen had to suffer before she was diagnosed with a venereal disease. Although in a hospital and realizing she has nothing more to lose, this unapologetic prostitute decides to reveal the true cause of her physical downfall.

She emphasizes the lack of regret over all things “save one” (1), and dedicates almost the entire monologue to locating the source of that contrition. Her story is one that presents the other side of professional prostitution and which must be taken into consideration if we want to fully understand the position of these women. Victorian prostitutes were exposed to numerous dangers that posed a threat to their economic standing, health, and even life. Since prostitution was not officially accepted as a professional trade, the governing patriarchy did not bother with providing sufficient health care to these women. For that reason, the majority of them were left unprotected from any disease their clients might have. As a kept woman, Levy's Magdalen could have been monogamously with her client, yet that did not prevent him from practicing his polygamy. As a result, this prostitute confesses

That you, who knew what thing would be,

Have wrought this evil unto me.

It is so strange to think still—

That you, that you should do me ill. (11-14)

Although we do not know much about the professional past of Levy's Magdalen, it would be safe to assume that she was a kept woman, a courtesan who must have lived with one man before falling ill. Her repetition that it was him, of all men, who transferred the disease to her signifies that their arrangement was more than just an incidental business encounter.

Additionally, Magdalen reveals the hypocrisy of this man by stating that he intentionally did this harm to her. Since the laws put into practice after the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts exempted men from having to undergo the examination which could diagnose whether or not they were infected, the women who were sexually involved with them were exposed to a high risk of contracting it. A testimony from a Chatham prostitute discloses the sanctimonious

nature of patriarchy. She explains that

It is *men, only men*, from the first to the last that we have to do with. To please a man I did wrong at first, then I was flung about from man to man. Men police lay hands on us. By men we are examined, handled, doctored. In the hospital it is a man again who makes prayer and reads the Bible for us. We are had up before magistrates who are men, and we never get out of the hands of men till we die!
(Walkowitz 92)

By enforcing the Contagious Diseases Acts, the governing body comprising only men managed to exert complete control over prostitutes. With the legal system officially supporting their actions, the Victorian patriarchs succeeded in dominating the seemingly irrepressible figure of the British sex worker.

The denunciation of the Chatham prostitute is comparable to the tone Levy uses when openly accusing men of deliberately making women powerless in the hands of dominant masculinity. Her Magdalen is adamant in the opinion that her last sexual partner caused her physical harm

Not as one ignorant or blind,
But seeing clearly in your mind
How this must be which now has been,
Nothing aghast at what was seen.
Now that the tale is told and done. (15-19)

She is not a silly young girl who does not understand the ways in which the society operates. Her profession has made her wise, unlike the “good” women of nineteenth-century England who cannot see past the deceiving appearance of the ruling gender. Levy’s Magdalen acknowledges

the disregard men in general had for women, and particularly prostitutes, whom they perceived to be dangerously independent and hard to control. She firmly believes that the man who infected her did so purposefully, and at this point she cannot even give him the benefit of the doubt. For her, such an act did not come from ignorance or lack of care—through this infectious disease the controlling force of patriarchy literally takes over the physical body of a woman.

Even though “Magdalen” is the only poem by Levy that explores the life of a nineteenth-century British prostitute, it is nevertheless a pivotal work which serves to uncover the misdoings of Victorian men. In this dramatic monologue, Levy relies on the voice of an unremorseful prostitute whose professional experience gives credibility to the well-articulated attack against the duplicitous male client. In this relatively short poem, she exposes the Contagious Diseases Acts as an institutionalized obsessive interest in identification and control of female sexual behavior. The punitive male gaze exercised its dominance over the “weaker” sex through the employment of the two pillars of patriarchy: the law and medicine. Their “preoccupation” with sexual reputation did not leave the figure of an insurgent woman. The men in power neglected to provide sufficient health care to prostitutes; instead, they focused on shielding male sexual deviance from the public eye. Thus Levy’s Magdalen became the spokeswoman for those members of her gender that collapsed under the instruments of a suppressive governmental system. Being in a position where she had nothing more to gain or lose, this impenitent prostitute committed herself to delivering the untold story to the nineteenth-century public—that of the hypocritical and nepotistic male client of the Victorian sex market.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

A high-class unrepentant prostitute was one of the most abhorred figures for the Victorian patriarchy. Not only was she rebelling against the established moral codes of conduct, but she also possessed a unique insight into the hypocrisy of the very system that imposed those norms on her, and the female population of England in the nineteenth century. For Thomas Hardy, Augusta Webster, and Amy Levy, the character of an unashamed prostitute served to expose the external reasons that lead to that choice of profession; Amelia's, Eulalie's, and Magdalen's stories exposed the injustice that was done to Victorian women in terms of economic freedom, pursuit of education, and equality of gender.

In Amelia, Hardy created a successful prostitute whose improved monetary situation and perceived elegance and sophistication result from the affluent clients she has encountered since becoming “ruined.” Instead of investing her “virtue” into a marriage and legally becoming the possession of her husband, Amelia opted for the independence of her spirit and her pocket. Using a sarcastic tone, this ruined maid defends her trade and attempts to enlighten those who were quick to judge the loss of her moral soul. Her arguments unveil the hypocrisy of the system that simultaneously enjoyed her services in the privacy of the bedchamber while publicly condemning her for daring to undermine the patriarchal control that kept women destitute.

Webster relies on Eulalie, another high-class impenitent prostitute who blatantly accuses the governing system of denying women an access to education that would enable them to rely on their intellect rather than on their submissive nature in order to provide for themselves. Coming from a middle-class family, she underwent the training that prepared her for a life of entertaining guests and a husband. Unequipped with any useful knowledge except how to keep

men pleased, she could not find any other profession that would enable her to transfer that training into an economically beneficial practice. By limiting the education she received, she argues that only prostitution offered a compensation lucrative enough to keep her financially secure and independent.

Levy, additionally, defends the “Great Social Evil,” and through the voice of her unapologetic Magdalen discloses the true unmentionable of the Victorian era—the male client. Her writing explores the ineffective manner in which the Contagious Diseases Acts were implemented by nineteenth-century British society. These rules institutionalized the obsessive interest in identifying and controlling female sexual behavior; however, male sexual deviance was conveniently kept out of the public eye, as the private life of Victorian masculinity could not have been publically exposed at any cost.

Despite numerous attempts to silence the voices of remorseless prostitutes, however, the Victorian patriarchy ultimately failed, as these women managed to find a way to present their side of the story to the public. Their frank confessions aimed to remove the stigma placed on their profession and explicate that their life choices were not guided by an insatiable desire for defying the abstract sense of morality, but were instead initiated by the most basic need for personal freedom and monetary independence. These ideas proposed by the writings of Hardy, Webster, and Levy inspired other late Victorian and early modernist authors, who continued to explain prostitution in purely economic terms.

George Bernard Shaw creates the distinguished character of Mrs. Warren whose high social status and financial prosperity result from her profession—just like Amelia, Eulalie, and Magdalen, Mrs. Warren is a high-class, unrepentant prostitute. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* steps into the modernist era with the goal of challenging the complacency of Shaw's audience and

subverting some of British society's most ingrained notions. In the preface for this play, Shaw wrote that his purpose was "to draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together" (xi). For him, prostitution represented a professional institution that enabled women to economically support themselves despite the educational depravity that was enforced upon them during nineteenth century. Therefore, I would argue, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* becomes a culminating literary work of art in which the views and opinions of Thomas Hardy, Augusta Webster, and Amy Levy were not only publicized, but also dramatized on that most public of platforms—the late Victorian stage.

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