CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE GREAT SOCIAL EVIL: IMAGES OF FALLEN WOMEN AND PROSTITUTES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM 1872 TO 1952

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By

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ABSTRACT

THE GREAT SOCIAL EVIL: IMAGES OF FALLEN WOMEN AND PROSTITUTES
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM 1872 TO 1952

By

Zabrina Zee Zahariades

Master of Arts in Literature

The focus of this thesis is to examine the literary representations of fallen women and prostitutes in America during the late-19th century and mid-20th century. I analyze how four American novelists between 1872 and 1952 constructed their fallen woman and prostitute characters. Although many studies have addressed the historical presence and sociological effects of prostitution, few studies have addressed how fallen women and prostitutes in American literature reflect the social mores of late-19th century and mid-20th century America. I examine how the image of the fallen woman is depicted in Louisa May Alcott’s Work: A Story of Experience, and how prostitutes are portrayed in Stephen Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, William Faulkner’s Sanctuary, and John Steinbeck’s East of Eden. The four authors in this study portray fallen women and prostitutes in a variety of ways to represent the social ills in America. I analyze how these authors address the social perspectives of gender and sexuality during the different time periods described in their works, from Alcott’s sympathetic portrayal of Rachel to Steinbeck’s characterization of Cathy, a woman determined to obtain independence.
INTRODUCTION

Fallen Women and Prostitutes:

Leading Causes in the 19th century and 20th century

The focus of this thesis is to examine the literary representations of fallen women and prostitutes in America during the late-19th century and mid-20th century. I analyze how four American novelists between 1872 and 1952 constructed their fallen woman and prostitute characters. Although many studies have addressed the historical presence and sociological effects of prostitution, few studies have addressed how fallen women and prostitutes in American literature reflect the social mores of late-19th century and mid-20th century America. I examine how the image of the fallen woman is depicted in Louisa May Alcott’s *Work: A Story of Experience*, and how prostitutes are portrayed in Stephen Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, William Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*, and John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*. The four authors in this study portray fallen women and prostitutes in a variety of ways to represent the social ills in America. I analyze how these authors address the social perspectives of gender and sexuality during the different time periods described in their works, from Alcott’s sympathetic portrayal of Rachel to Steinbeck’s characterization of Cathy, a woman determined to obtain independence.

In order to differentiate how unmarried, sexually active women were depicted during this time period, I examine the terms “fallen woman” and “prostitute.” Although the term “fallen woman” is often synonymous with “prostitute,” each term is defined differently. A woman who loses her “good” reputation by having sex outside of marriage
during the 19th and 20th century is labeled a “fallen woman,” and a person who intentionally has sex in exchange for money is considered a “prostitute.” Though having premarital sex may lead a woman to become a prostitute, it is not inevitable for a fallen woman to become a prostitute. Nevertheless, the authors depicted their respective societies as viewing both types of women as marginalized outcasts.

Under certain circumstances, women were more likely to enter prostitution. For instance, if a fallen woman’s family refused to support her, she had to find a way to financially support herself, but her options were limited. If she found legitimate work, it was typically hard labor and she often earned an insufficient income. Choosing another option, she might have attempted to become a wealthy man’s mistress. Some women had to resort to prostitution, but prostitution came in a number of different social forms; for instance, a woman may become a courtesan, who was more socially tolerated as a prostitute because her business was solicited within the confines of a brothel and not advertised in the streets for everyone to bear witness, or she may become a socially ostracized streetwalker, desperately soliciting men on the streets for their pocket change.

Women who were desperate enough to enter prostitution were socially viewed in a negative way because 19th and 20th century society judged women based on their compliance to traditional gender roles. Typically during this time, women were expected to become a “good” woman of True Womanhood, as Barbara Welter proposes, by following the honorable path of marriage and motherhood, while conducting themselves by obeying the “four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (152). A woman, who was a ripe age for marriage, usually sixteen years old, was a piece of property to be “bought and sold as if they were cattle” (Caird 83). Simone de
Beauvoir notes that a young woman was trained from a young age to prepare to be a servant to men, particularly their husband, because she is “her husband’s prey, his possession” and is no longer a free woman (171). Not only did a woman have to give up a will of her own, she was expected to surrender her body as part of the marital contract.

**Circumstances Leading to American Prostitution:**

Throughout 19th century America, industrialization helped to cause severe problems of poverty, which was due to overpopulation and a lack of job opportunities. William Dwight Porter Bliss notes that during this time about 20% of the population in the major industrial states was poverty-stricken, and the nation as a whole was estimated at having 10,000,000 people in economic difficulties (941). As a result, some of these people resorted to robbery and prostitution in order to get money to survive. Bliss also discloses that only 36.5% of the adult population in the United States was married (755). Though the dynamics of a traditional family unit were changing, the majority of society still expected traditional marriages to be upheld. Since there was a decreased rate in marriage, single women had to find a way to support themselves. While some women did not assume the traditional female roles of wives and mothers because they lacked opportunities for marriage, other women chose not to marry in order to free themselves from what they considered oppressive positions. These women had to find a career in order to obtain economic independence, but they often struggled to find a job, because “virtually all skilled jobs and access to occupational mobility were reserved for male workers” (Foner 1159).
Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace note that during this time, female wage earners were no longer discriminated against by just society; even the government was making it more difficult for single women to profit from their own labor. “The Industrial Congress adopted rigid positions on ‘woman’s place’ and said female wage work was ‘incompatible with the true dignity and nature of women.’ The real solution was for men to be paid a ‘family wage’ that would allow them to keep their wives at home, as did the men of the bourgeoisie” (Burrows and Wallace 801). Supporters of this position tried to discourage women from pursuing work, especially middle-class women, who were expected to assume traditional roles within the confines of their homes. However, some women had no other choice than to persist beyond these obstacles.

When women were able to find work, it was typically in female defined positions as domestic helpers, seamstresses or laundrywomen and “another 25 percent earned their livings in factories and workshops” (Foner 1159). There were few options outside of these jobs, but working at any job for some wage was better than nothing. During this time, an estimated 40% of women wage earners were single, and some had children to provide for (Kleinberg 109). It seemed almost impossible for them to financially survive when they earned wages “between fifty cents and two dollars a week [while] (unskilled male laborers in other fields got seven dollars a week)” (Burrows and Wallace 665). Often times, these women workers earned only enough money to buy a scarce amount of food and rent meager shelter. The lower class could not afford other things like lantern oil and heat, which were considered luxuries because they were not necessary for basic survival.
When legitimate work was unavailable and there were no family members or friends to support them, women could become frantically desperate. Under extreme circumstances, they committed crimes for money rather than starve to death. In 1890, there were 6,405 female criminals, representing 7.78% of the total 82,329 criminals in the United States: 3,833 women committed crimes against society and 1,325 against property (Drahms 218). Crimes against society were considered “disturbances of the peace” and “drunkenness,” and crimes against property were “burglary, arson, [and] theft” (Forman 301). The female criminal population was most likely greater than what was reported because most females were shown leniency by the police and jury, and their victims were “less likely to complain” (Parmelee 243). Ironically, many women were not prosecuted because men regarded them as subordinates.

In 1900, New York City citizens commissioned investigators, The Committee of Fifteen, to examine the causes of prostitution and found that young, innocent females were often enticed by a scheming man. Some urban bachelors embraced their dominant roles in society to seduce naïve women. As Charles E. Rosenberg notes, traditional women expected men to maintain proper gentlemanly behaviors of “virtue” and “sexual prudence” at all times (144). So it was difficult for some traditional women, who lived a sheltered life and believed in romantic ideals, to recognize the city bachelors’ seduction method. As a result, women were seduced with gifts and false promises of marriage. The Committee found that this scheming man followed a pattern of calculated maneuvers:

He dresses better than the ordinary neighbourhood boy, wears an abundance of cheap jewelry, and has usually cultivated a limited amount
of gentlemanly demeanour. His occupation is a professional seduction.

By occasional visits he succeeds in securing the friendship of some attractive shop-girl. By apparently kind and generous treatment, and by giving the young girl glimpses of a standard of living which she has never dared hope to attain, the friendship rapidly ripens into infatuation.

(Committee 156)

If the man sexually had his way with the unmarried woman, became bored with her, and abandoned her, the woman would be left in a vulnerable situation. She would not have a husband to support her, and she would be socially considered a fallen woman. On the other hand, there was a double standard. As Charles E. Rosenberg notes, premarital sex for a man was justified by the masculine ideology “that sexual energies had somehow to be discharged if health was to be maintained after puberty” (140). As a result, most men would not be socially punished. They would be able to freely move in society and commit the same humiliation to other unknowing women.

Since fallen women were no longer socially considered “pure,” they were often denied legitimate work. Though a fallen woman was not branded with a scarlet “A” to publicize her indiscretion to the world, her reputation was frequently a topic of neighborhood gossip. As Karen V. Hansen notes, gossiping “was a primary mean of circulating information and it regulated moral behavior” (43). For example, Hansen describes how businesses would often encourage the workers to gossip about their co-workers behavior, and in turn, the company blacklisted “those who ‘misbehaved,’ morally or politically” (46). As a result of being exiled from legitimate work, these women became desperate and they resorted to having sex with men for money. Though
prostitution is socially unacceptable, it is essentially a “capitalistic enterprise,” in which “the contract between client and prostitute is seen as a private arrangement between buyer and seller” (Pateman 189). During the 19th century, prostitution was a successful business and particularly prevalent in “all major port cities in the United States” (Mutari 53-54). In fact, 49% of working women in American cities “engaged in prostitution full- or part-time and/or temporarily to cover industrial layoffs, or inadequate wages” (Mutari 53-54). This statistic is not really surprising after one considers that a “young woman making $5 a week in a store could make $35 as a prostitute” (R. Rosenberg 24).

As The Committee of Fifteen noted, the profession of prostitution was nothing new. Although considered one of the “most venerable traditions” and a “phenomenon coextensive with civilized society,” prostitution was, of course, not a socially acceptable career (Committee 1). In her 2003 book, Visions of Filth: Deviancy and Social Control in the Novels of Galdos, Teresa Fuentes Peris traces the idea that prostitutes were a moral disgrace and were synonymous with filth and disease to the 5th century religious leader, St. Augustine, who compared prostitutes to the sanitation system. This principle persevered in the 19th century, as society linked the concept of sewer drains to prostitution. For example, since “drains and sewers were used to eliminate waste and filth in an attempt to prevent infection, the prostitute also became visualized as a ‘human sewer’ that society could use to drain away its excess of seminal fluid, its excess of male desire” (Peris 38). In other words, prostitution was thought to be necessary. While women were able to obtain monetary gain, men could eliminate their “animalistic instincts” and reenter polite society as sexually placated men.
In highly populated cities, it was easier for prostitutes to conceal themselves from moral judgment by getting lost in the overpopulated crowd. This anonymity also made it hard to determine an accurate count of prostitutes, because “many women cannot be identified as such. There are various classes of prostitutes, which shade from apparent respectability to the well established status of women in open brothels” (Woolston 37). Typically “visible prostitution both makes market commodity available to men and threatens the social distance male customers require of prostitution in order to keep their lives as tricks and johns separate from their roles as husbands, lovers, fathers” (Barry 221). Other times, it was usual to “hide prostitution from view. In ‘respectable’ neighborhoods, prostitution existed only in the most discreet high-class houses catering to a wealthy clientele…all other prostitution was deliberately limited to urban slums, where genteel society could ignore its existence” (Rosen, Lost Sisterhood 4). Sometimes, the higher paid prostitutes could afford the latest fashions and pass as respectable women. This highlights the arbitrariness of clothing as a means of identification, because people can disguise themselves in types of clothes representing another class. Some prostitutes could also follow this scheme and safely interact in normal social situations, but typically the poorer female prostitutes could not afford more than a measly portion of food.

My Plan:

Though prostitutes were present in society, they were not a topic of “polite” conversation. Since “prostitution has often been regarded as an obscene subject, and rarely considered a suitable subject for the creative writer, the very silence of literature shows the attitude of the reading public as well as the writer” (Bullough 237). In my
thesis, I address how Alcott, Crane, Faulkner, and Steinbeck use their literary artistry to inform the public about prostitution. I approach the texts from a feminist perspective to analyze how images of the fallen woman and prostitute in American novels reflect the historical social mores regarding these women. I use Dr. William Sanger’s study in 1858 on prostitution in the United States to illustrate the increasing problems of prostitution in major cities. I also include Kate Millet’s Sexual Politics, Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, and other contemporary works, including Jessica Spector’s Prostitution and Pornography, to explain how feminist theorists view prostitution as a means of economic survival for many women. I then use the historical data and the theoretical material to examine each novel and to address specific aspects of the fallen woman and prostitute character in each text.

The first chapter discusses Louisa May Alcott’s Work: A Story of Experience (1875). Previous research focuses on the protagonist, Christie, but fails to sufficiently elaborate on the role of Rachel, a fallen woman. I focus my argument on how 19th century women typically ostracized unchaste women and explain how Alcott opposes this behavior. Presenting a close reading of the scene in which Rachel is judged by the seamstresses, I analyze how Christie is the only woman to defend Rachel. I also examine the scene in which Rachel saves Christie from suicide, and Rachel explains that by helping other girls, she is able to redeem herself. Alcott constructs these scenes to suggest that although a social community may influence an individual’s attitudes, that same individual may choose a moral stance of tolerance and acceptance.

Stallman presents a textual difference between the 1893 edition and the later 1896 version. In the 1893 edition, Maggie, a fallen woman/prostitute, is murdered, but the 1896 version implies that she commits suicide. Robert M. Dowling disputes this claim in *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* and suggests that the tamer 1896 revision was edited to “appease the marketplace” (76) and explains that Maggie’s suicide “allows her to achieve redemption by contrition” (77). I argue that Crane allows Maggie to exhibit personal power by taking her life into her own hands. By performing a close reading of Maggie’s death in both editions, I present evidence that Maggie’s only means of escaping the slums is through death. Though Crane creates a predictable account of a fallen woman’s plight, the authorial construction and revisions of Maggie’s death alter the significance of the text.

The third chapter discusses William Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*. Typically, research focuses on the female protagonist, Temple. For example, in Joanne V. Creighton’s “Self-Destructive Evil in Sanctuary,” she argues that Temple is unprepared to deal with the harsh realities she finds outside the bounds of her sheltered lifestyle. Sally R. Page is one of the few scholars to mention the female character, Ruby. Though Page discusses Ruby in her book, *Faulkner’s Women: Characterization and Meaning*, she compares Ruby’s love to Temple’s selfishness. Though Ruby is an ex-prostitute, Faulkner portrays her as generous and motherly, but shows Temple, a Southern belle, disobeying patriarchal authority by having secret rendezvous with Southern boys. In a close reading of the text, I analyze these characterizations, arguing that Faulkner has Temple adapt to life in a brothel to further show how women, regardless of their social class, have sexual desires. Also, Faulkner has Ruby conform to the traditional role of wife/mother to show that
sexualized women can also adopt more traditional feminine roles, even though the Old South finds sexually active, unmarried women unacceptable. Through these characterizations, Faulkner subverts the traditional feminine ideal in order to challenge the limited sexual roles for women.

The fourth chapter discusses John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*. Though John H. Timmerman argues, in *John Steinbeck’s Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken*, that Cathy is the personification of evil, I disagree. I argue that Steinbeck has Cathy exhibit extreme behaviors in order to obtain autonomy, and she reacts with violence to defend herself. I closely examine Cathy’s socially deviant behavior throughout the novel. I specifically address her choice of prostitution and her motivation for shooting her husband, Adam, as a form of social rebellion. Steinbeck characterizes Cathy in this way to challenge the traditional role of women in society as subordinates to men. Steinbeck suggests that women like Cathy, who are expected by society to follow the traditional role of wife/mother, are forced to rebel against these norms in order to obtain independence.

In the last section, I conclude that Alcott encourages readers to examine why a fallen woman is negatively viewed by society, while Crane highlights the social injustices that poor women must endure while living in the city slums. Also, Faulkner examines how society views women based on their social class, and Steinbeck creates a female character who tries to break free from the gender restraints of her time to obtain autonomy. Overall, each piece works together to illustrate how these women attempt to survive, adapt to, or confront the changing mores of the society in which they lived.
CHAPTER ONE

Louis May Alcott’s Work: A Kinder Heart Among the Sinners Than the Saints

In Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885-1917 (1989), Laura Hapke explains that their presence was often prohibited from social discussion, and few 19th and early-20th century novelists characterized a fallen woman or prostitute. “In fact, she [the fallen woman or prostitute] had been mentioned only in passing from inception of the nation’s literature” (Hapke 1). By the end of 19th century, some respectable writers were bold enough to create a fallen woman or a prostitute in their stories, but the authors were “wary of increased censorship and the unwritten laws of the genteel literary marketplace…and relegated her to the status of a minor character” (Hapke 1). Louisa May Alcott, who was active in social reform movements, wrote Work: A Story of Experience in 1873, depicting a society that marginalizes a fallen woman, Rachel. Though Rachel is a minor character, Alcott uses her as a means to have the main character, Christie, a bachelorette determined to economically and legitimately provide for herself, witness how women discriminate against Rachel because of her previous sexual behavior. As a result, Christie and Rachel find ways to challenge this social bias. Overall, Alcott conveys the message that women must work together in order to overcome the oppression they experience in a patriarchal society.

Though Work is not a radical feminist protest against misogyny, it subtly makes readers challenge the 19th century social belief that fallen women are evil. Though Rachel is present in only three scenes of the novel, Alcott creates highly emotionally
charged scenes involving her character to emphasize her importance. The referenced scenes show how Rachel is affected by the sexual double standard and the trials she must overcome to survive. Like most 19th century women who had sexual relations outside of marriage, Rachel is socially shunned and treated like a pariah. Unmarried men, who committed the same transgressions, were not treated as harshly. There was an unspoken understanding that a man needed to purge his sexual urges, while it was a proper woman’s duty to help men repress their sexual impulses. When men could not contain their desires, they relied on prostitution, which was silently declared a necessary evil, because “without prostitution, lascivious men might seduce rather than marry the virgins of their own social class” (Abbott 268-69). Alcott briefly mentions Rachel’s lover, but focuses her attention on Rachel. Though Alcott shows sympathy for Rachel, the text does not contain evidence to indicate that Alcott condones premarital sex. Instead Alcott, a proponent of Christianity, questions how women, especially Christian women, can be so cruel to a fallen woman when the Bible illustrates many stories of forgiveness. Alcott has Christie witness the callous treatment toward a fallen woman, and reveals how the Christian women consider Rachel disposable. As a result, Alcott plants the seed for readers to contemplate the injustice of this harsh treatment toward fallen women.

Initially, Rachel and Christie have similar non-traditional aspirations. Rachel embarks on a journey to achieve economic autonomy and Alcott begins the novel with Christie claiming, “‘there’s going to be a new Declaration of Independence’” as she attempts to go on a comparable journey to become self-sufficient (Alcott 5). While Rachel follows her emotions and ignores the socially mandated standards that expect a young lady to maintain her chastity, Christie adheres to the moral custom of virginity.
until marriage. It is with this one decision that their social status is distinguished. Alcott creates these comparable scenarios to emphasize the possibility that any woman could easily make the “wrong” decision and go down the same path as Rachel. Yet, Alcott does not portray Rachel as a seductress. Instead she humanizes Rachel, which allows the reader to sympathize with Rachel’s situation. Through Alcott’s characterization of Rachel, she brings social awareness about the difficulties fallen women endure and promotes the idea that they should not be ostracized for their indiscretions.

Commentators of the period reinforce Alcott’s opinion about fallen women, particularly Dr. William Sanger, who worked at Blackwell’s Island in New York, and specifically aided prostitutes. He questioned 2000 of the women he treated to find out why they entered prostitution. He found that 525 of the women entered prostitution out of destitution, and 258 women were seduced and then abandoned (Sanger 488). In 1858, he published his study in the History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World to bring social awareness about his findings. He found that these women were:

human beings, though depraved. Their hearts throb with the same sympathies that move the more favored of their sex. Their minds are susceptible to the same emotions as those of other females. Few of them become vile from natural instincts: poor victims of circumstances, many of them would gladly amend if the proper means were used at the proper time. (Sanger 23)

Dr. Sanger suggests that fallen women are human, and he agrees with Alcott that they are redeemable. There were also many social activists who commented on the harsh
treatment of fallen women. For instance, Mary Jeune, a British aristocrat, used her prominent status to advocate for social justice. In her 1886 article “Helping the Fallen,” Jeune reports that “it was not the fashion to hold out the hand of fellowship to the misguided,” and that “when a woman wandered from the path of virtue, the door of society was relentlessly barred against her” (56). In his 1879 essay, “On Fallen Women,” Thomas Augustus Forbes Leith, a descendent of Scottish aristocracy, depicts how the women were treated at the reformatory asylums for fallen women. He explains that women were “abused, and worked worse than the lower animals, badly fed” and had “a wretched slave life” (Leith 65). Leith is appalled by these cruel conditions that the women are forced to endure and pleads for his audience to be “merciful” to their “erring sisters,” because their “kindness” will help “reclaim the fallen” (Leith 65). These activists represent an alternative to the more popular public opinion for the punishment of fallen women. Like Alcott, they advocated for social reform and redemption for neglected women.

Though Rachel as a fallen woman is an important aspect in Work, recent criticism on the novel is limited and typically focuses on Christie. In “The Limits of Sympathy: Louisa May Alcott and the Sentimental Novel,” Glenn Hendler writes how Christie tries to find a purposeful life by balancing between the male public working world and an intimate emotional connection among female companions. Elizabeth DaGue also concentrates her argument in “Images of Work, Glimpses of Professionalism in Selected Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Novels” on Christie’s search for independence by working at an array of different positions. Tara Fitzpatrick contends in “Love’s Labor’s Reward: The Sentimental Economy of Louisa May Alcott’s Work” that Alcott initially
challenges the traditional role of women in *Work* by allowing Christie to enter the working world, but argues that Alcott does this only to return Christie to the domestic sphere. In “From Success to Experience: Louisa May Alcott’s *Work*,” Jean Fagan Yellin briefly mentions Rachel, but only in relation to how Christie is affected. Yellin focuses on Alcott’s historical involvement in the 19th century women’s rights movement and illustrates how Alcott constructs Christie to reflect this same interest. Building upon this criticism, I will illustrate how Alcott specifically creates Rachel to reflect the evolving opinion of fallen women and how women can fight for their equal rights, even if society ostracizes them based on their perceived lack of morality.

Alcott begins *Work* by having Christie choose a life outside the traditional female role of a marriage, “which is rare in women’s fiction; it differs so dramatically from the historical reality of women’s opportunities and possibilities” (Langland 114). Christie, whose parents have died, lives comfortably under the care of her uncle and aunt, but she decides to end her dependence on them. She strives to enter the patriarchal workforce and earn her own money to support herself. Alcott establishes Christie’s home in a financially stable environment to indicate that Christie is not forced to provide for herself, but actually decides by her own volition to become independent. Along her journey to earn a decent wage, she experiments with different jobs in Massachusetts. During her varying employment as a servant, actress, governess, companion and seamstress, Christie confronts many obstacles and manages to overcome them. Alcott uses these experiences to help Christie develop and mature. Christie learns about racial discrimination, religious hypocrisy, social injustices, and the depths of loneliness, but more importantly, she

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discovers that with a strong female friendship she has enough support to endure any difficulty.

Throughout Christie’s transitions into each career change, she has been so intent on finding her independence that she has been too busy to make many intimate acquaintances. By the time Christie is working as a seamstress, she is quite lonely and in need of some companionship. Initially, Alcott positions Christie in opposition to the other seamstresses. Christie is an outsider to these “frivolous” girls who are preoccupied with conversations limited to the topics of “dress, gossip, and wages” (Alcott 103). As a result, Christie avoids having conversations with them. When Christie becomes more familiar with the workroom environment, she looks beyond the chatter of gossip from the other girls and notices Rachel, who works “in her own somewhat isolated corner” (Alcott 104). Christie shows an interest in Rachel’s “silent ways” and “her evident desire to be let alone” (Alcott 103). Rachel is mysterious, as her “eyes were old with that indescribable expression which comes to those who count their lives by emotion, not by years” (Alcott 103). When Christie speaks to Rachel, Rachel responds with “mute eloquence,” “quiet coldness,” or “wordlessness” (Alcott 104). Christie is not deterred. She becomes more “determined to win her confidence,” because Rachel’s “eyes belied her words, and those fugitive glances betrayed the longing of a lonely heart that dared not yield itself to the genial companionship” (Alcott 104). Though Rachel does not speak in words, her gestures and eye contact with Christie communicate how she really feels. As Christie makes a strong effort to gain Rachel’s affection, Rachel hides in the corner and avoids bringing any attention to herself. Through Christie’s determination to become friends with Rachel instead of any other girl, Alcott emphasizes that Christie is
specifically attracted to Rachel because she seems to share her sense of isolation and loneliness. Since both girls come from middle class families, Alcott suggests that there is a kinship between them as neither has been prepared to deal with the harshness of city living and share a gentleness that the other seamstresses lack.

After much persistence, Christie encourages Rachel to speak and understand that her voice is valuable. Eventually, “Rachel’s coldness melted,” and she accepts Christie’s friendship, but under the pretext that they would not have “‘any impertinent curiosity’” or “‘uninteresting confidences,’” which includes divulging their secrets (Alcott 104). As a result of their blossoming friendship, Rachel shows a “newly kindled light in her lovely eyes” (Alcott 105). Both women are happy to find a friend in the lonely city, and they adhere to their agreement of not dwelling on their pasts or the reasons for Rachel’s deep sadness. Their friendship would be based simply on their love for one another. Elizabeth Abel explains, “Through the intimacy which is knowledge, friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition for women, clarifying identity through relation to an other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self” (416). Alcott designs a similar intimacy for Rachel and Christie by creating a safe place for them inside the realm of the male-dominated society to relax and freely be themselves. Through their friendship, Alcott creates a communal solidarity to illustrate that women can experience a sense of empowerment with each other’s support. As a result, “Alcott creates a web of female relationships that make a net to catch women who fall” (Donaldson 197). By doing this, Alcott conveys the message that women should be able to rely on other women and not be condemned by them. Yet, Alcott initially does not allow the girls to experience a candid relationship because she keeps their pasts a secret from one another.
this, Alcott allows the women to get to know each other without being influenced by each other’s past mistakes. Once their friendship is firmly rooted, they can accept each other regardless of their prior transgressions.

After Rachel begins to become an active presence in the workroom, other women in the workroom notice her and subject her to their scrutiny, which leads to the disastrous revealing of her “dirty little secret.” Alcott illustrates how Rachel is harshly judged by creating an interrogation scene reminiscent of the Salem Witch Trials in 1692. Alcott positions the women in a hierarchal structure of a courtroom. The shop owner, Mrs. King, who “sat majestically at her table” is the judge, as her name “King” suggests a royal lineage of power, while the workroom forewoman, Miss Cotton, who “stood beside her, looking unusually sour and stern,” is the instigator (Alcott 106). The name “Cotton” references Cotton Mather, a 17th century New England Puritan minister, who “offered his advice to the magistrates and may well have written the public statement of the ministers that urged prosecution of the witches” during the Salem Witch Trials (Crunden 12). In the novel, Miss Cotton, like Mrs. King, is an influential force. By characterizing Miss Cotton in this manner, Alcott evokes how one person’s judgment can affect a community. The rest of the courtroom-like setting consists of the seamstress audience and Rachel, standing alone “before them all, with her face hidden in her hands, and despair in every line of her drooping figure…a meek culprit at the stern bar of justice, where women try a sister woman” as the accused suspect (Alcott 106). Alcott evokes sympathy for Rachel by describing her as a helpless victim, while also igniting an aversion toward the judgmental women. Mrs. King addresses the “court” and explains the “charges” against Rachel:
It appears that Rachel, whom we all considered a most respectable and worthy girl, has been quite the reverse. I shudder to think what the consequences of my taking her without a character (a thing I never do, and was only tempted by her superior taste as a trimmer) might have been if Miss Cotton, having suspicions, had not made strict inquiry and confirmed them. (Alcott 106)

In this passage, Alcott indicates that Mrs. King overlooked any suspicions about Rachel’s character in order to improve her business because Rachel had “superior” sewing skills. Mrs. King does not name the “thing” that Rachel has allegedly done, but claims that Miss Cotton has uncovered incriminating information. Alcott has Mrs. King avoid naming the “thing” to imply that it is too awful to talk about, which suggests the “thing” is some sort of sexual misconduct. Alcott does not provide any evidence to suggest that Rachel is a prostitute. The only information that is supplied suggests that she has sex with her lover, which establishes her as a fallen woman.

Much later in the novel, Alcott reveals Rachel’s hidden past and identity. Through the narration of Rachel’s brother, David Sterling, Alcott discloses that Rachel’s real name is Letty, and like Christie, she initially left her family home in search of work to “support herself” (Alcott 265). David goes on to explain that “life was too hard for her; pleasure too alluring, and when temptation came in the guise of love, she could not resist…she was gone, never to come back, my innocent little Letty anymore” (Alcott 265-66). David’s reference to Letty, as being no longer “innocent,” indicates that Letty has become a fallen woman because she had sex with her lover, though they were not married. Letty tries to regain contact with her family by writing them a “penitent,
imploring, little letter, asking to be forgiven and taken home, for her lover was dead, and she alone in a foreign land” (Alcott 266). In response, David refuses to forgive Letty and declines any further contact with her because she “had brought a stain upon our honest name that time could never wash away” (Alcott 266). Shortly afterward, David receives another letter reporting that the “ship in which Letty had taken passage was lost” and he assumes that she is dead (Alcott 267). But in actuality, “the ship sailed without her; she came later; and, finding that her name was among the lost, she did not deny it, for she was dead to us” (Alcott 268).

After being rejected by her family, Rachel has nowhere to go and has nothing left to lose. Alcott gives her a new life and a different identity to distinguish her past innocence from her present identity. She is no longer Letty, a shortened name of Violet, which was one of the flower names “immensely popular as emblems of innocence and freshness” for girls in the mid 19th century (Wells 132). This name change emphasizes the importance of Letty’s transition. David, who is a floriculturist, a professional procurer of flowers and plants, defines violets as a symbol of “love” (Alcott 201). A violet is also one of the “great floral symbols of the church” and a symbol of “humility and patient virtues of the Christian life” (Seaton 686). Since she is no longer a violet, an image of “innocent, unspoilt love,” the name “Letty” does not suit her character (Wells 218). Unlike Letty, the name “Rachel” is more suitable. On the one hand, Rachel is a woman in Genesis 30 of the Bible, who waits many years to marry and then have sex, but the name also comes from Hebrew and means “ewe,” a female sheep (Spangler and Syswerda 55). Like other lost souls in the Bible, Rachel has “gone astray like a lost sheep” by sinning in unwedded coitus (Bible, Psalm 119:176). By choosing to assume
the name “Rachel,” she takes the first step to find a way to redeem herself for “‘her single sin’” (Alcott 268). Alcott creates this alternate identity from Letty into Rachel to distinguish how she is no longer innocent, but a lost soul who is willing to do penance for her mistake.

Back in the “courtroom scene,” however, the reader does not yet have this information as Rachel tries to make her own case. In response to Mrs. King’s and Miss Cotton’s accusations, Rachel is “roused…from her state of passive endurance” and find the “courage to plead for herself,” but she only addresses Christie (Alcott 107). Rachel confesses:

> It is true that I once went astray, but God knows I have repented; that for years I’ve tried to be an honest girl again, and that but for His help I should be a far sadder creature than I am this day. Christie, you can never know how bitter hard it is to outlive a sin like mine, and struggle up again from such a fall. It clings to me; it won’t be shaken off or buried out of sight. No sooner do I find a safe place like this, and try to forget the past, than some one reads my secret in my face and hunts me down. It seems very cruel, very hard, yet it is my punishment, so I try to bear it, and begin again. What hurts me now more than all the rest, what breaks my heart is that I deceived you. I never meant to do it. I did not seek you, did I? I tried to be cold and stiff; never asked for love, though starving for it, till you came to me, so kind, so generous, so dear,—how could I help it? Oh, how could I help it then? (Alcott 107-8)
Rachel does not direct her speech to the other women because they are closed off from listening to reason and Christie is the only one who has shown her any affection. Though Rachel does not specifically name her crime, but refers to it as going “astray,” “sin” and “fall,” she admits to her wrongdoing. She also questions how she could she have known better and “help it then” which can also reference her initial fall. The use of the word “it” implies two things. At first it seems as though Rachel is asking Christie how she could have stopped from being friends with her, especially since Christie was so persistent with her kindness and friendship. The other meaning of “it” stems from Rachel’s initial fall of being seduced by a man she loved. So knowing this information, the reader understands that the “it” could also refer to Rachel’s questioning of how she could have stopped loving her mate.

Alcott does not explain Miss Cotton’s motivation to investigate Rachel, nor confirm how Rachel’s history is revealed, especially after she changes her name. Kara Virginia Donaldson suggests that Rachel is under scrutiny because Miss Cotton “represents the puritan heritage of the Cottons and Mathers condemning, rather than forgiving, the sinner” (229). But Miss Cotton also demonstrates the Victorian adherence to a strict order, depicting “Victorianism as obsessively puritanical” (Himmelfarb 15). Unchaste females were a threat to society; their “uncontrolled sexuality represented for them potential chaos. Women had to be pure to enforce male continence” (Freedman 20). Alcott characterizes Miss Cotton with these ascetic beliefs to illustrate how she refuses to stray from the path of absolute purity (Alcott 109). She is resistant to having anyone undermine her strict standards of living. As a result of her ostensibly high
morals, her testimony is taken as absolute without any other evidence. Alcott constructs this circumstance to criticize how a rigid perspective can be prejudicial and excessive.

Alcott positions Christie as a mediator in this scene to initiate another perspective and provoke the reader to question why Miss Cotton’s word alone is sufficient enough evidence to condemn Rachel. Christie gently approaches Rachel and softly lifts her head to look into her eyes. She asks Rachel to explain her side of the allegations. Rachel is too overwhelmed to respond in words and has a “woeful countenance” that Christie understands as a confirmation of Rachel’s guilt (Alcott 107). Christie assertively responds in disappointment and says “‘Oh, Rachel, I so loved and trusted you!’” (Alcott 107). Christie’s response is hypocritical because when she begins her relationship with Rachel, she specifically mentions that they should “not burden” each other “with uninteresting confidences” of their pasts (Alcott 104). Yet, Christie judges Rachel, as the other women have done. Ultimately Christie confesses that she does not “reproach” Rachel, though she is much “grieved and disappointed” by Rachel’s waywardness (Alcott 108). She advocates for Rachel’s safety and tries to convince Mrs. King to keep Rachel on as a seamstress. Christie continues to defend Rachel and questions the women about what will happen to Rachel when she leaves the workroom. Alcott constructs Christie’s speech to rouse empathy for Rachel. Christie says, “‘Mrs. King, think of your own daughters, and be a mother to this poor girl for their sake’” (Alcott 108). Christie makes a last attempt to persuade Mrs. King from her harsh verdict, and proclaims “if she does go back to this old life, the sin of it will lie at our door, and God will remember it against us in the end” (Alcott 110). Since the women claim to be Christians, Alcott questions their religious sincerity. Alcott suggests that Miss Cotton follows the Old Testament and
promotes vengeance against sinners. Yet, Christie rebels against this opinion and embraces the New Testament, which promotes forgiveness.

Mrs. King is affected by Christie’s speech and responds with a sympathetic gesture: “her cold eye softened, her hard mouth relaxed, and pity was about to win the day” (Alcott 108). Mrs. King pities Rachel, but she is hesitant to take the chance of losing her business by allowing Rachel to continue working there, because Rachel’s presence, as she says, “would be the ruin of my establishment; not a girl would remain, and the character of my rooms would be lost forever” (Alcott 108). The moment that Mrs. King is momentarily swayed by Christie’s plea, Miss Cotton gives Mrs. King a disapprovingly strict “eye” and threatens to leave her own position in protest (Alcott 110). As a result, Mrs. King resumes her strict assessment of Rachel and follows Miss Cotton’s judgment to terminate Rachel’s employment. Mrs. King justifies her solution by explaining to Rachel “there are proper institutions for such as you, and I advise you to go to one and repent” (Alcott 109). Mrs. King’s decision is not surprising because during the 19th century “many women and men refused to associate with or employ even a suspected fallen woman. Thus outcast, the first offender often entered a vicious cycle which led her directly into the criminal class, often as a prostitute, as case histories illustrate” (Freedman 14). This moment also illustrates how much impact Miss Cotton, like Cotton Mather, has on the magisterial authority towards the final decision.

Once the verdict is revealed, Rachel views the audience of seamstresses as they return to their work. Her “eye went round the room; saw pity, aversion, or contempt, on every face, but met no answering glance, for even Christie’s eyes were bent thoughtfully on the ground” (Alcott 109). The other seamstresses do not interfere with the
interrogation or the judgment. This treatment toward Rachel illustrates the power of social conformity when no one is willing to challenge the inequity of socially established authority. When Mrs. King gives them orders to resume work, they hesitate. The seamstresses sit motionless, appearing to enact a silent rebellion, yet ultimately they are unwilling to actually do anything about it. Presumably, they may do this for fear of losing their job and being put in the same position as Rachel, or they may feel overwhelmed by the situation. Alcott does not provide any evidence to conclude either possibility, but her advocacy for social reform and the equality of women suggests that she would have contempt for the women who remained silent. By illustrating that none of the girls try to help Rachel, Alcott suggests how inaction may keep women powerless.

Alcott uses silence as a means for the audience to reflect on the social suppression of female power. Without a voice, women like Rachel are not heard and are easily ignored. Tillie Olsen in _Silences_ suggests that women often struggle with believing in themselves and the “importance of what one has to say, [and] one’s right to say it” (Olsen 27). In her characterization of Rachel, Alcott addresses the extreme powerlessness of a fallen woman and how the harsh judgment of a community can prevent the fallen woman from finding her own voice. Without having anyone to listen to what she might have to say, her voice echoes in isolated existence. In this fallen state, Rachel’s initial silence illustrates her powerlessness and corresponds to the Victorian notion that a “fallen woman is usually depicted, even in literature, as a mute” for she wishes not to be noticed (Auerbach 29). It is only after Rachel begins to speak and make her presence known in the workroom that Miss Cotton intentionally seeks to discover Rachel’s unspoken history. Eventually Alcott allows Rachel to find her own voice and proclaim:
It’s no use for such as me to try; better go back to the old life, for there are kinder hearts among the sinner than among the saints, and no one can live without a bit of love. Your Magdalen Asylums are penitentiaries, not homes; I won’t go to any of them. Your piety isn’t worth much, for though you read in your Bible how the Lord treated a poor soul like me, yet when I stretch out my hand to you for help, not one of all you virtuous, Christian women dare take it and keep me from a life that’s worse than hell. (Alcott 109)

In this speech, Alcott finally allows Rachel to defend herself and assert her own power. Rachel breaks her silence to confront the judgmental women in the workroom, who condemn rather than help her. Even though these allegedly church-going women have given up on her, Rachel adamantly states her refusal to give up on herself. Alcott’s construction of this speech reveals and condemns the historical presence of religious hypocrisy.

Commonly in the 19th century, a “powerful aspect of tradition in Victorian America was the Christian religion” and often times the “moral seriousness of the Victorians seems narrow-minded or, alternatively, hypocritical” (Howe 525). This is apparent in the novel as Miss Cotton and Mrs. King uphold their stringent standards and ignore the tenet of forgiveness. Their choice to enforce a particular Christian principle is “monovocal” and silences “diverse perspectives” (Brauch 47). In other words, Miss Cotton and Mrs. King select certain aspects of Christian beliefs and ignore the others. By doing this, Alcott asks the readers to confront their own religious beliefs and question if they are honestly following the tenets of their chosen religion. Alcott reinforces her
disapproval of religious hypocrisy by having Christie confidently declare her resignation in protest of the discrimination against Rachel. Through Christie’s action, Alcott conveys that this injustice should not be ignored. The only way to implement change is by taking action.

Though Christie’s gesture causes Rachel to be “silent with surprise,” her speechlessness is a sign not of submission, but of an overwhelming gratitude to Christie (Alcott 111). Since her family abandoned her, Rachel has struggled with insecurity and shame. In witnessing Christie’s faith in her, Rachel is motivated to restore her honor. Rachel proclaims, “I never can go back; you have saved me, Christie for you love me, you have faith in me, and that will keep me strong and safe when you are gone” (Alcott 112). Rachel is determined to redeem herself, but she declares that she must leave Christie in order to accomplish her mission. Donaldson suggests, “Rachel’s ‘unfallen spirit’ indicates both her triumph over despondency and Alcott’s argument that the ‘fallen’ woman can repent and be forgiven and that a woman may be fallen bodily but spiritually ready to avoid despair” (Donaldson 232). As a result, Alcott shows Rachel as being more spiritually intact than the falsely religious women in the workroom who refuse to grant her forgiveness.

Upon their departure, Rachel and Christie exchange roles as the “impure becomes pious and the pious almost falls” (Donaldson 197). While Rachel begins her search for redemption, Christie becomes despondent from the inhumanity she witnesses. Donaldson explains, “Despondency often occurs at moments of transition in which individuals or protagonists become aware of the limitations of their situations and begin to see how hard it will be to reach their goals” (204). In turn, Christie reaches a turning point when she
realizes that the world is not as pious as she once thought and she is permanently
changed. Christie finds it hard to be in a society with women who pretend to be
Christian, and then turn their hand away from a person like Rachel, who is in dire need of
help. She struggles to go on living: “her heart was empty and she could not fill it; her
soul was hungry and she could not feed it; life was cold and dark and she could not warm
and brighten it, for she knew not where to go” (Alcott 115). Consequently, Christie’s life
quickly spirals out of control. She becomes physically ill and is unable to pay back the
money she owes different vendors. As a result, she becomes seriously depressed. In
turn, she gives up religion and declares, “‘I never shall get religion’” and distances
herself from the public world (Alcott 116). Alcott has Christie react so passionately to
illustrate her loss of faith in Christianity, and her repulsion of associating with religious
hypocrites.

Alcott further illustrates the extreme possibilities of Christie and Rachel’s role
reversal. Christie becomes very desperate and contemplates suicide. One night she
walks to a wharf and sees the “black water rolling sluggishly below” (Alcott 124). She
wonders “how a human body would look floating through the night” and “she seemed to
lose her identity” (Alcott 124). Before Christie is able to drown herself, she is saved by a
“woman’s arm” (Alcott 124). The woman happens to be Rachel, whom Christie once
saved. Rachel comforts Christie with the knowledge and experience of having been in
Christie’s position before. Rachel says, “‘I know the state, Christie: I’ve been through it
all! but when I stood where you stand now, there was no hand to pull me back, and I fell
into a blacker river than this underneath our feet. Thank God, I came in time to save you
from either death!’” (Alcott 126).
The importance of sisterhood is a recurring theme in *Work*. Jean Fagan Yellin highlights that “earlier, Christie’s offer of sisterhood had rescued a lonely gentlewoman like herself who had been stigmatized as a sexual deviant; Alcott now reverses this, accomplishing Christie’s rescue through Rachel’s intervention. Thus she twice asserts the primacy of female solidarity” (Yellin 537). Yellin also points out the fact that “Christie is rescued at the water’s very edge not by a romantic lover, but by a loving caring woman” (531). Though the act of saving a damsel in distress is usually done by a male character and reinforces the notion of a patriarchal power, Alcott positions Rachel as the rescuer to reinforce the idea that women can help each other.

Upon this reunion, Alcott provides details about Rachel’s hard work and relays the message that salvation is possible. Rachel describes the wickedness she experiences in a “‘city, larger and wickeder than this. I tried to get work here, that I might be near you; but that cruel Cotton always found me out; and I was so afraid I should get desperate that I went away where I was not known’” (Alcott 125). Miss Cotton prohibited Rachel from forgetting or washing away her stain of dishonor by driving Rachel to the outer boundaries of society where Miss Cotton could not see her. This reinforces the patriarchal notion that “women who fall, must remain fallen” and most often their fate leads to death (Donaldson 197). Alcott disregards the convention that the “fallen woman must die at the end of her story” (Auerbach 35). Auerbach suggests, “Death rather than marriage is the one implacable human change, the only honorable symbol of her fall’s transforming power” (Auerbach 35). Alcott challenges this idea by allowing Rachel to survive and persist beyond Miss Cotton’s constant persecution.
Not only does Rachel persist, but she also becomes more truly Christian than the religious hypocrites in the workroom. Rachel explains that her “human imperfection only seems to make real piety more possible” (Alcott 215). As a result, Rachel is characterized as being more confident. She discards her previous role as a lost sheep and takes on the duty of a “shepherdess” to other wayward girls, as “sheep need to be led, and the shepherd goes to great trouble to find the sheep which has strayed” (McKenzie 799). From the affection she receives from Christie, Rachel is willing to share this love with the unloved girls in the lower parts of the city. Rachel declares, “I knew how many poor souls went wrong when the devil tempted them; and I gave all my strength to saving those who were going the way I went. I had no fear, no shame to overcome, for I was one of them” (Alcott 126). Her past experiences of being fallen and socially condemned prepare her to help these girls. Rachel explains, “With every one I helped my power increased, and I felt as if I had washed away a little of my own great sin” (Alcott 126). By doing good deeds for these girls, she is actually doing penance for her past sin and in this process she is on the road to redemption.

Alcott illustrates Rachel’s final affirmation of redemption during the final scene of the novel. Rachel is no longer an outsider but a participant in an accepting society with strong female friendship. This unconditional “friendship has brought them [the women] closer together while simultaneously allowing them to become independent individuals and bringing new understanding to themselves, each other and the world” (Buchanan 86). Instead of depending on a husband, these women look to one another for support. Though Alcott limits the presence of male characters in the novel, she does not dislike men. Instead, she is more concerned with emphasizing the importance of female
solidarity. Alcott repeatedly promotes the “power of female community” in order to convey the message that one woman may not be able to fight the world, but as a collaborative unit they can challenge the “socially expected values of female passivity and self-suppression through marriage” (Langland 113). For Alcott, marriage is not the only outlet for women to strive for; as this novel suggests, she advocates for female independence, which is reflected in her characterizations of Rachel and Christie.
CHAPTER TWO

Stephen Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets:

Maggie’s Hopeless Resignation to “go teh hell”

During the 19th century, scientific advancement allowed doctors to better understand the development of contagious diseases, including venereal diseases. In 1873, Dr. Frederic Sturgis estimated that 5% of people in New York were infected with syphilis (Gould and Pyle 913). Dr. Sanger found that 821 out of 2000 New York prostitutes had at least one or more incidents of gonorrhea and/or syphilis, which suggested a link between venereal diseases and prostitution (Sanger 487). Though prostitution was once a prohibited topic of discussion, “in the 1870s and 1880s the prostitute becomes the focus of a heated debate between doctors, legislators, and feminists” as the issue of public health was unavoidable (Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder 150). Doctors advocated for “compulsory medical examinations for women suspected of prostitution,” while feminists associated “prostitution with the depressed wages and inferior social status of all women” (Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder 151). In 1867, New York lawmakers passed the Contagious Diseases Act, which permitted police officers to “apprehend women of doubtful virtue in the streets and insist that they be medically examined; if found to be diseased, they could then be detained in lock hospitals” (Liggins 39). Feminists like Caroline Dall and Susan B. Anthony recognized that prostitution was a serious problem, but they disagreed with legislation on regulating prostitution because the Contagious Diseases Act “would deprive women of basic civil rights” (Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder 158). In response, Anthony became a part of the “New Abolitionism, the campaign to
abolish prostitution by reforming male morals” and encouraging women to exercise their power in political protest (Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder 160).

Prostitution was particularly prevalent in economically deprived city slums. Jacob Riis, a New York journalist, wrote How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York in 1890 to report on the dire conditions that affected three-fourths of New York’s population who lived in tenements (Riis 2). The unsanitary conditions of the tenements caused a public health concern for the “dread of advancing cholera” (Riis 15). This situation inspired the 19th century movement for tenement house reform in New York. In 1867, the Board of Health was formed and the first tenement law was passed. In 1884, a Second Legislative Commission was enacted to further tenement reform. In 1895, social activists continued to fight for reform, which led to the ratification of the Tenement House Act. American fiction authors joined the effort by writing novels that illustrated the stark realities of slum life.

Stephen Crane was one of those activists who depicted the harsh life of prostitution and living in city slums in his writing. Initially Crane was a journalist who reported on the bleak life in the New York City slums. From his journalistic experiences he was inspired in 1893 to write his first novel, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. He characterizes Maggie Johnson as an innocent girl who is trapped in a New York slum. She becomes a fallen woman and progresses in a downward spiral to prostitution. Though Crane does not provide detailed information on Maggie’s initial step into this profession, he provides enough material for the reader to understand the reasons for Maggie’s descent. Crane uses Maggie’s mother, brother and lover as a means to position Maggie in the role of the victim. Maggie’s mother is the authoritarian figure within the
domestic sphere, but the men maintain authority outside the confines of the home. As a result, Maggie remains powerless no matter where she goes. When she first meets her lover, Maggie is hopeful about escaping her circumstances, but Crane does not give her a fairy tale ending. As Sanger reports, a prostitute’s life expectancy was “four years from the beginning of their career” (455). Crane portrays this reality by having Maggie die shortly after she resorts to having sex for money. Throughout the novel, Crane portrays Maggie as being completely dependent on men. By placing Maggie in this subservient position, Crane presents a realistic representation of a 19th century, lower class woman, allowing him to critique the harsh conditions of the city slums. Through Maggie’s fate, he suggests that even a “good” girl cannot escape the hopelessness of the slums.

Originally, Crane could not get Maggie published, because publishers were hesitant to print the book with the “profanities in the text, which were shocking, even unpalatable” (Knapp 41). Crane’s difficulty to find a publisher is not surprising since in the “climate of the 1880s and 1890s such texts were perceived as scandalous, as they refused to endorse accepted views of female sexuality, instead contributing to new images of female sexual identity through representations of the prostitute” (Liggins 53). Crane was so determined to get Maggie published that in 1893 he paid $869 for 1100 printed copies. He did not have much success with the sale of the book, so he distributed most of the copies to his acquaintances. Then, after The Red Badge of Courage was a literary success, publishers became interested in Maggie. In 1896, D. Appleton and Company agreed to publish Maggie after some revisions were completed. The changes included tamer, less vulgar language. The two versions also have alternate endings. In
the 1893 edition, the text implies that a fat man murders Maggie, but in the 1896 version, the text suggests she commits suicide.

Many scholars have focused their analyses on the textual differences in the two publications of *Maggie*, comparing the 1893 edition to the 1896 revision and debating how Maggie dies. Robert Wooster Stallman first frames this debate in his 1955 article, “Stephen Crane’s Revision of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*” and claims that the textual differences in the varying texts suggest that in the 1893 novel a man murders Maggie; but in the 1896 version, the man is edited out of the story, suggesting that Maggie commits suicide. Robert M. Dowling and Donald Pizer revisit this topic in the 2009 article, “A Cold Case File Reopened: Was Crane’s Maggie Murdered or a Suicide?” Dowling agrees with Stallman and believes Crane created the “1893 ending as a radical departure from the Victorian norm—unredeemed murder by the fat man” (Dowling and Pizer 46). Pizer disputes the claim and suggests that the “‘huge fat man’ does not murder Maggie when they reach the East River. With her acceptance of him, she has reached the absolute darkness which he represents and which the presence of the river confirms” and as a result, Maggie kills herself (Dowling and Pizer 41). In “A Feminist Interpretation of Three Nineteenth Century Literary Heroines: Hardy’s Tess, Crane’s Maggie and Ibsen’s Nora,” Mary Jane Clerkin introduces another reading of Crane’s characterization of Maggie. She proclaims, “Crane shows his misogyny toward her by his brutal treatment of her” and “allows her young life to go to waste” (Clerkin 113).

I disagree with Clerkin’s assessment that Crane characterizes Maggie with misogynistic overtones; instead, I argue that he realistically reports on the conditions of the slums. I believe he includes the possible murderer in the 1893 edition to illustrate the
worst possible dregs of society, who come from the darkest depths of the city. In the absence of the fat man in the 1896 text, Crane implies that Maggie’s only means of escape is through suicide. Since there is no way for Maggie to leave the slums, she actively chooses to give up prostituting herself and ends her life. Though suicide in general is often depicted as a sign of weakness, Maggie’s active pursuit of the river illustrates her personal decision; she does not simply respond to another character’s demand. Though Crane creates a predictable account of a fallen woman’s plight, the authorial construction and revisions of Maggie’s death alter the significance of the text. Comparing Maggie’s death in the original text and D. Appleton and Company’s 1896 edition, I argue that Crane characterizes Maggie in the original text as a powerless victim in a desperate situation, but he makes editorial changes in the second version to illustrate that Maggie refuses to endure anymore misery by asserting her individual power and taking her life with her own hands.

Suicide is typically judged as a moral offence, but some scholars believe that suicide can be a rational decision. For instance, Dr. S. A. K. Strahan, a 19th century physician, suggests that a person has a right to commit suicide “to escape a worse evil” (Strahan 44). In the 16th century Sir Thomas More advocates suicide in *Utopia* when a person is “full of continual pain and anguish…not able to do any duty in life” (More 134). In *Philosophical Writings*, David Hume, reflecting upon suicide, writes, “‘prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence, when it becomes a burthen’ (Hume 546). Though there is no evidence to suggest that Crane read these philosophical writings, Crane similarly uses suicide to illustrate the inescapability of tenement life. In the revised text, Crane suggests that Maggie asserts her individual
power of choice to commit suicide, freeing herself from her destitute life in an act of liberation.

In *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Stephen Crane addresses the realistic struggles of tenement life in Rum Alley, which is located in the Bowery district in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The Bowery was synonymous with “alcoholism, poverty, homelessness, and crime,” which included prostitution (Dowling 49). It was also “self-contained and self-sufficient…its turbulent life had nothing in common with that of the rest of the city” (Morris 35). Crane describes Rum Alley as:

a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels. (Crane 6)

The landscape is “gruesome” and dirty with “yellow dust.” The streets are lined with clustered buildings and have a “hundred windows.” The mass numbers of residents “stamping about in its bowels” have “uncombed hair” and engage in “frantic quarrels.”
They neglect their children and abandon them “to the street and the gutter.” This
description reveals the dreadful conditions that Maggie is subjected to live in and causing
the “attitudes of chronic dejection” in the inhabitants of Rum Alley. The narrator
acknowledges that the reader may have difficulty imagining the environment because
“there are some things so far removed from the lives of normal, decent people as to be
simply unbelievable by them” (Sims 47). The decent people, who are from the city’s
wealthier districts, are portrayed in sharp contrast. Crane describes “an atmosphere of
pleasure and prosperity” as the theatre lets out (Crane 62). The crowds, who are “born,
perhaps, of good clothes,” hail cabs with a “polite request” (Crane 62). By introducing
these vastly different settings, Crane separates Rum Alley from the upper class districts
of Manhattan, allowing the reader to get a glimpse of the city’s underworld and
highlighting these disparate worlds.

Within the space of the slums, Crane creates Maggie, the main character. Crane
declares that Maggie has “blossomed in a mud puddle,” although “none of the dirt of
Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins” (Crane 18). With this description, Crane
classifies Maggie as an innocent girl, inviting his “respectable” female readers to
sympathize with Maggie. By placing Maggie in a callous world, Crane has her confront
different obstacles to show how difficult it is for a nice girl to survive in this
circumstance. Her difficulties are shown on her “thin, white face,” “small frame” and the
fact that “her features were haggard from weeping, and her eyes gleamed from fear”
(Crane 14).

Though Maggie begins as a bright light in imminent darkness, her socio-economic
circumstances confine her in the destitute lower class. She is trapped with her negligent
family in a tenement apartment, which is repeatedly referred to as a “‘reg’lar livin’ hell!’” (Crane 12). Violence is a constant occurrence in her home and usually administered by her mother. When Maggie’s brother, Jimmie, enters the apartment after he is in a senseless fight with another neighborhood boy, the mother carelessly knocks down their baby brother, Tommie, as she lunges to punish Jimmie for fighting. Crane describes how the “mother’s massive shoulders heaved with anger. Grasping the urchin by the neck and shoulder she shook him until he rattled” (Crane 8). Her actions are not a logical response to teach Jimmie how to properly behave or how to prevent further altercations. Instead, this form of discipline perpetuates a cycle of abuse. Since the mother hits Jimmie, he follows her example and uses violence to express his frustrations. Crane characterizes the Johnson family as cruel to show how they are affected by living in the harsh conditions of the slums. As Gandal writes, “The slum is not an evil place but a separate moral universe, whose alternative ethics have developed in response to its inferior social status and physical misery” and the people “have either hardened against the hardship and humiliation of their circumstances, or they have sunk into self-loathing” (Gandal 760). The family exhibits only base and vulgar human behaviors because they have hardened their emotions as a defensive mechanism. The parents even go as far as to dull their senses with an abundance of alcohol.

It seems peculiar that the mother would care that Jimmie is in a brawl, but she is angered that he disobeys her explicit instructions not to fight. Her reaction indicates that she is frustrated with her family life and her socioeconomic position. Like Maggie, she is trapped without an escape, but she chooses to cope differently with her circumstance. The mother disregards the conventional traits of femininity, including virtue and
temperance. Instead, she exhibits tyrannical rage and brutality, like that of a “sated villain” (Crane 13). The enormity of “both her anger and size mark her as excessive, as insufficiently feminine” (Irving 37), and her rejection of maternal responsibility “serves as proof of her monstrosity” (Irving 35). Her authority is only effective within the walls of the tenement home, as the home is the typical realm where female power is acceptable. When the father tries to intervene in Jimmie’s punishment, the mother attacks him and the fight ends with her as the “victor” (Crane 9). In contrast, when she leaves the confines of the home, she is powerless. This is apparent when the mother goes into the streets and tries to assert her power. The policemen, who represent patriarchal forces of lawful order, often must arrest her. “Her flaming face and rolling eyes were a sort of familiar sight on the island” (Crane 19). Crane characterizes the mother as the antithesis of a “proper” woman, suggesting that a woman exercising brutal power is abnormal and grotesque. To survive in the tenement, a woman must submit to the harsh conditions by becoming monstrously unfeminine, or if she seeks to maintain her femininity, she is doomed to escape only through death.

Maggie, on the other hand, is ill equipped to endure a life in the slums. Though Maggie’s body resides in the Bowery, she is incapable of adapting to its harsh surroundings. Crane constructs her to reflect the traits of a delicate Victorian woman, including kindness, obedience, virtue, and a preoccupation with household duties. Maggie does not learn this behavior from her mother or an environmental influence. For instance, she shows a nurturing motherly affection toward Jimmie after his mother beats him, and tries to tend to his wounds, even after he senselessly “struck her” a few hours earlier (Crane 7). Maggie makes sure to follow the authoritative demands of her mother.
and brother for fear of being on the receiving end of any violence. Yet, she remains innocent and naively trusts people. She also exhibits signs of domesticity as “she tottered on her small legs beneath burdens of dishes” (Crane 10) and purchases material for drapery in a “flowered cretonne for a lambrequin. She made infinite care and hung it to the slightly-careening mantel” (Crane 23). This drapery symbolizes the providential life that Maggie desires, which include being married and living happily ever after.

Maggie is not pious, as there is no textual evidence to indicate that she has been exposed to any religion. So without a role model or a form of guidance, Maggie is easily susceptible to temptation, including the delusional fantasy that she can obtain fine, luxury items and that a higher-class man can save her from a tenement life. In describing the beautiful piece of material, Crane suggests that an element of Maggie’s dream is able to materialize into fruition. Soon after, her mother notices that Maggie hungers for a better life. In a violent act of a dysfunctional motherly protection, Mrs. Johnson tries to force Maggie to realize the impossibility of this dream by destroying the lambrequin, with the “knots of the blue ribbon appear [ing] like violated flowers” (Crane 24). Since Maggie is caught up in her fantasy, the “violated flowers” of the drapery becomes a precautionary sign that indicates that Maggie will “fall” if she continues to be careless and vulnerable to the dangers of the city. Maggie must learn to survive, unless she can escape to a “correct environment in which she might come to embody the ideal of American womanhood” (Irving 38). While she is imprisoned within the boundaries of the slums she copes by dreaming of escaping her dire circumstance.

After Jimmie overhears the neighborhood men talking about Maggie’s womanly development, he is aware of the dangers that may arise and he informs Maggie what she
must do. He says, “‘Yeh’ve edder got teh go teh hell or go teh work!’” (Crane 19).

Maggie does not question her brother’s authority. Since the phrase “go to hell” means to “become a prostitute” (Hayes 12), Maggie “went to work having the feminine aversion of going to hell” (Crane 19). Crane explains:

She got a position in an establishment where they made collars and cuffs. She received a stool and a machine in a room where sat twenty girls of various shades of yellow discontent. She perched on the stool and treadled at her machine all day, turning out collars, the name of whose brand could be noted for its irrelevancy to anything in connection with collars. At night she returned home to her mother. (Crane 19)

Crane depicts the realistic atmosphere of a factory workroom by having Maggie experience the confinement and monotony of a typical workday. As a seamstress, she is assigned to her post and must remain there for the duration of her shift. This is a very depressing scene, as the workroom is full of girls of “yellow discontent.” They are like trapped animals in a cage and forced to run on a hamster wheel to earn their food. Crane creates this scene to raise social awareness about the conditions of the sewing factories. He calls the readers’ attention to the manufacturing process of detachable collars, which were a typical 19th century fashion accessory. Crane reveals how 19th century readers’ everyday conveniences are a contributing factor to the seamstresses’ misery.

Like most Bowery girls, Maggie “possessed few if any educational qualifications,  

1 Collars and cuffs were used to protect clothing from the “accumulated perspiration and airborne dirt” because most people did not bathe daily (Turbin 90). This allowed wearers to remove the collars and cuffs from their clothes to be frequently washed, while the actual clothing would be laundered less often. In this way, they could project an image of cleanliness, while not actually being entirely clean.
no real vocational qualifications, no real vocational training and few marketable skills,”
which limit her employment options (Phoenix 77). Being discontent with meaningless
work, Maggie is desperate to do something more fulfilling. Since the city is
overpopulated, there is an abundance of educated girls, who are well qualified for
employment in white-collar jobs such as secretaries, teachers or nurses. As a result,
Maggie has no other viable option for work and is forced to do manual labor. William
Sanger describes the situation for many girls in Maggie’s position, as “her brain is
disengaged, and while her mechanical duties are adroitly performed, the mental faculties
will be in full exercise” (535). As a result, Maggie has little to occupy her thoughts. She
copes by letting her whimsical imagination run free, as her “dim thoughts were often
searching for far away lands where, as God says, the little hills sing together in the
morning. Under the trees of her dream-gardens there had always walked a lover” (Crane
21). Consequently, Maggie creates a romantic vision that a male hero will rescue her
from her intolerable life. Crane uses the dream of a male savior to suggest that Maggie
has unrealistic fantasies, which lead to her downfall.

By positioning Maggie in this situation, Crane is able to introduce the “seduction
scenario that was a staple of nineteenth-century popular fiction” (Hapke, “The American
Working Girl” 46). The typical “seduction scenario” illustrates how a wealthy man
would seduce a poor virgin and then abandon her after he had sex with her. Though
unwedded sex was still negatively viewed by society, the man was forgiven for the
indiscretion, but the woman was shunned. Victorian ideology “suggest[ed] that purity
came naturally to women, in contrast to men, who had to struggle to control their innate
lust” (Freedman 19). As a result, there was a double standard. Women were expected to
tame a man’s sexual appetite by refusing his advances, but if she succumbed to his seduction she was ultimately blamed. Alfred C. Roe claims that male seducers “are mainly, if not wholly, responsible for this; for a woman seldom becomes a deliberate temptress till she has been pulled down and ruined” (35). These men use a precise method to entice unsuspecting girls. Initially, “these girls are flattered by the handsome, well-dressed stranger paying them marked attention, and are quick to accept invitations to the theater,” and after he gains her trust, “her scruples and arguments are easily overcome by the skilled deceiver, and trusting him implicitly as her accepted lover, she unwittingly goes to her doom” (Crittenton 131). Instead of marrying these girls, the men preferred to stay single, refusing the responsibility of a wife or family. In 1890, 44.9% of men in New York between 15 years of age and older were content being bachelors (Chudacoff 50). On the other hand, their female peers were raised on stories of knights in shining armor and expected men to rescue them from their wretched servitude. Crane illustrates that Maggie has these same fantasies, which make her vulnerable to such alluring persuasion.

Maggie is different from other seduction themed novels of the 19th century because Crane has his characters come from the same social class, as both Maggie and Pete live in the Bowery and do not have enough money to leave. Kevin Hayes suggests that the “promise of a better life exists in Maggie’s romantic imagination, not in Pete’s words,” because Pete is incapable of providing her with a better economic standing. Regardless, Maggie dreams about having a happier life with him (Hayes 15). Initially she is impressed by his “blue double-breasted coat, edged with black braid, buttoned close to a red puff tie, and his patent-leather shoes,” which set him apart from the drab
attire of the other neighborhood men (Crane 20). She is further mesmerized by Pete’s “enticing nonchalance” and “personal superiority” (Crane 20). She is also captivated by how “Pete loomed like a golden sun” (Crane 30) and envisions the “golden glitter of the place where Pete was to take her” (Crane 24). Crane’s use of the “golden” color suggests that Maggie views Pete as a man with a wealth of gold. Through these details, Crane illustrates how Maggie is astonished by the image Pete portrays. As a result, Maggie is deceived that he is a “beau ideal of a man,” because she believes he represents everything that she desires, including luxury and adventure, though he does not (Crane 21). Since Maggie lacks a loving family or friend, she mistakes Pete’s meager demonstration of kindness for love. In turn, she is encouraged to focus her affection toward him. Crane uses Pete as the catalyst for Maggie’s delusional fantasy to escape her intolerable life and possibly enter a higher social class.

Once Maggie meets Pete, she cannot forget that another world exists outside of her horrible home and job and identifies Pete as the knight in shining armor to save her from the daily drudgery of her life. She reviews her surroundings and realizes the actual extent of the depravity of the “dark, dust-stained walls, and the scant and crude furniture of her home” and her job in the factory “began to appear to her mind as a dreary place of endless grinding” (Crane 23). So when Pete takes her out for a night of entertainment, Maggie is overwhelmed with new experiences. In particular, she is awestruck when she sees a play at the theater where the hero, who was once poor, ends the play in wealth. She is so excited that “she drew deep breaths of pleasure” and “no thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar and cuff factory came to her” (Crane 28). Maggie is able to witness a different world, where things look brighter and happier. She becomes hopeful
that a similar change can happen in her own life, in which Pete “becomes her ‘ideal man’ a prince charming who could sweep her out of her squalor” (Knapp 50). Bettina Liebowitz Knapp suggests that “Maggie is too naïve and perhaps too unintelligent ever to understand and properly judge people or situations. Hungry for affection and love, she muses about how to impress the ‘knight’ of hers” (Knapp 50). Maggie gets so caught up in the excitement that she does not contemplate the consequences of her actions and gets trapped in the smoke of her self-created illusion. Crane suggests that Maggie gets caught up in a fairy tale fantasy and fails to realize the reality and Pete’s actual intentions.

Crane begins to challenge Maggie’s delusion when her family disapproves of her “questionable” relationship with Pete. Though Crane characterizes Maggie’s family as dysfunctional and vulgar, they reject Maggie once they suspect she is having sex outside of marriage. This seems hypocritical, since Jimmie is promiscuous. In this way, Crane highlights the absurd unfairness of the double standard that society perpetuates. Crane illustrates how Jimmie is pursued by one of his past sexual partners, Hattie. In response, Jimmie tells her “go teh hell” and avoids her (Crane 57). Jimmie is suggesting that Hattie should become a prostitute. Maggie’s family responds to her with the same condemnation. For example, Mrs. Johnson lectures Maggie by saying:

“Yehs knows yehs have gone to deh devil. Yer a disgrace teh yer people, damn, yeh. An’ now, git out an’ go anh wid dat doe-faced jude of yours. Go teh hell wid him, damn ye, an’ a good riddance. Go teh hell an’ see how yeh likes it” (Crane 36).

Once again Maggie is told to “go teh hell,” which foreshadows her path to prostitution. When the mother says that Maggie has “gone to deh devil,” she is implying that Maggie
has already had sexual relations with Pete. But at this point, Crane has not provided any textual evidence to support her claim. In fact, when Pete initially goes to kiss Maggie, she “laughed, as if startled, and drew away from him” (Crane 28).

Regardless of Maggie’s innocence, she is kicked out of her family home. As a 19th century commentator, Florence Mabel Dedrick notes that a lack of a family home “is the reason why many go deeper down in sin. A sad mistake here many parents make, refusing forgiveness, when your child may have made just one mistake” (Dedrick 114). Without the support of her family, it is inevitable that Maggie falls and is at Pete’s mercy. But how can Maggie fall when she already lives in the lowest squalor? The term fallen woman is a misnomer, because a lower class woman is not in a position worth falling from (Logan 27). Lynda Nead explains that “only a respectable woman could fall from virtue and social status” (76-77). Though Maggie lives at the bottom social stratus, she is not an immoral dreg of society. Crane differentiates her from the Bowery community by characterizing her as naïve to suggest that Maggie “fall[s] by sins of ignorance” because she cannot comprehend the blatantly sexualized scenes surrounding her (Roe 35).

Even after being banished from her home, Maggie is still convinced that she is in an ideal romantic relationship with Pete. She assumes that Pete will take care of her, and she becomes fully dependent on him. She feels safe being near Pete with his “strong protecting fists” (Crane 46). She believes that “her life was Pete’s and she considered him worthy of the charge” (Crane 46). But after three weeks with Pete, her “air of spaniel-like dependence had been magnified and showed its direct effect in the peculiar off-handedness and ease of Pete’s ways toward her” (Crane 51). During this time, Maggie ostensibly consummates her allegiance to Pete, because Pete’s behaviors mirror
the reaction of a seductive bachelor after reaching his goal of being sexually satisfied. Crane illustrates Pete’s growing disinterest with Maggie as Pete takes her to sexually uninhibited places, which are symbolic of Maggie’s loss of innocence. For example, in “Chapter 12” Maggie accompanies Pete to a sordid club and does not experience the same “deep breaths of pleasure” as she did going to the theater in “Chapter 7” (Crane 28). Instead, Maggie is scared and uncomfortable. During the stage performance, Maggie witnesses the singer slowly stripping off each layer of her clothing. Maggie became “timid” and “leaned with a dependent air toward her companion” (Crane 45). Maggie tries to avoid seeing the rest of the exhibitionist performance by huddling closer to Pete. In this scene Crane demonstrates how Maggie’s “fantasy has been indulged to an extent that she can no longer tolerate the reality of her environment” (Holton 49). Yet, she cannot make her fantasy a reality. Though she expects Pete to help her escape the slums, she fails to realize that Pete is also trapped in the same desolate environment.

Though Pete seduces Maggie, he is not immune to being a victim of seduction at the hands of Nell. Crane describes her as “a woman of brilliance and audacity” (Crane 51). Nell has “brilliance” because she is experienced with men and has mastered a technique to overpower them. As the reader sees, when she enters a club with “a mere boy,” Freddie, he is compelled to follow her commands (Crane 51). After they encounter Pete and Maggie in the crowd, Nell has the “audacity” to promise Pete “a heluva time” (Crane 53). Pete is easily persuaded to leave with Nell, while Maggie and Freddie are left behind. Eventually Nell gets Pete drunk and empties his wallet by “taking up bills and stuffing then into a deep, irregular-shaped pocket” of her cleavage (Crane 68). Though Jane Billinghurst suggests that this behavior is characteristic of a “deadly
temptress in all her glory. Cold, self-centered, and ruthless, she strips the man of everything and then discards him,” I disagree (95). Instead, I believe that Nell has learned how to adapt to the Bowery environment and has acquired the needed skills to do whatever is necessary to survive. She does not exhibit any signs of shame or remorse. As Hapke notes, Nell “can fleece a customer and exit laughing. She survives, distrusting men and earning a good living from them” (Hapke, “Girls Who Went Wrong” 54). In this scene, Crane conveys the message that a resilient woman does whatever is necessary to survive. Though Crane portrays Nell as a powerful force and initially characterizes Maggie as passive, both women rely on men as their primary source of income. Essentially the only way for them to achieve financial gain is through some kind of relationship with men, and neither woman can support herself outside of the patriarchal economy.

After Pete abandons Maggie, she is “dazed” and does not know what to do (Crane 54). Crane presents three different paths for a female character to take; however these options provide limited possibilities for Maggie. She can choose to become a brutish wife, an independent working girl, or a successful prostitute. Maggie could assume the role of wife/mother, but this is not possible at this point in her life. Since Pete is her only love interest, she has no possibility of getting married because he is content with being a bachelor. When she seeks Pete’s protection, he refuses and tells her, “‘Oh, go teh hell’” and shuts the door in her face (Crane 61). Maggie attempts to become a working girl, but in the absence of a proper education, she is only capable of physically demanding work in a seamstress sweatshop. Also, a seamstress typically earned $0.60 a day, which added up to $3.00 a week and $22.00 a month (Hapke, “The American Working Girl” 47). A 19th
century woman could not make enough money to support herself. The introduction of
Nell’s character presents an alternative path. Though Maggie’s family repeatedly tells
her to “go teh hell,” she is not sexually aggressive and is ill prepared to enter prostitution.
Unlike Nell, Maggie is incapable of acquiring a similar “brilliance and audacity” because
she “has never developed any armor for her soul” (Gandal 779). Therefore, she is
incapable of surviving on her own, and without protection, she becomes a hapless waif
abandoned to the dangerous city streets. Crane suggests that inhabitants of the tenement
must develop armor to defend themselves against the harsh environment. Since Crane
characterizes Maggie as defenseless, he implies that she is too fragile to endure the harsh
means necessary for survival.

After experiencing the shock of her abandonment, Maggie is “bewildered and
could not find speech” (Crane 61). When she is able to focus on dealing with her
predicament, “she wandered aimlessly” and asks herself who would be able to help her
(Crane 61). She realizes the severity of her situation, as there is no one, until she comes
“upon a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat, whose decorous row of
buttons reached from his chin to his knees” (Crane 62). His “silk hat” is an expensive
accessory that implies that he is a man of importance and his “chaste black coat”
indicates that he is a clergyman. His face is “a picture of benevolence” and “his eyes
shone good-will” (Crane 63). Unaccustomed to religion and clergymen, she does not
know anything about them, but she “had heard of the Grace of God, and decided to
approach this man” (Crane 61). She is hopeful that he will have sympathy for her. In her
last plea for help, before she can utter a word, “he gave a convulsive movement and
saved his respectability by a vigorous sidestep. He did not risk it to save a soul” (Crane
62). Attempting to avoid contact with her, he makes a “convulsive movement” as a reaction of repulsion at seeing Maggie as an abomination. Instead of fulfilling his moral duty to help Maggie, he disregards her need for help. He is more concerned with fulfilling his self-interest to maintain the respect of his constituents, who may disapprove of him aiding an undevout and sinful girl like Maggie.

Though his father was a minister, Crane repudiated Christianity because he disagreed with the stringent and inflexible senselessness of an ascetic religion. As Jean Cazemajou notes, Crane rebelled against religion and “strove to debunk a cluster of false values, especially ambition, conformity, worldly wisdom, military glory, and traditional religion” (32). Crane includes the clergyman in the above scene to critique the similar religious hypocrisy that he witnessed during his tenement investigations. Crane illustrates that this representation of an ascetic religion lacks human compassion and denies Maggie the opportunity to repent for her wrongdoing. As a result, Maggie is completely alone, and there is no place left for her to find salvation. This treatment toward a fallen girl is comparable to what Alcott has Rachel experience in Work. Alcott does not create a scene where a priest directly rejects her plea for assistance, but self-proclaimed religious women shun Rachel. Luckily, Christie is there to accept Rachel, regardless of her past transgressions. Maggie is not as fortunate, because she does not have anyone to help her recover from making the bad decision of trusting Pete.

Characterized as a helpless victim, Maggie inevitably faces the destructive forces of the city that will consume her. As she is left to her own defenses, she becomes “weak in body and mind, her character loses fixedness of purpose and tenacity and true energy” (Brace 117). She drifts toward the inescapable identity associated with her name.
“Maggie,” a shortened form of Magdalene, is “deliberately equated with the practice of prostitution” (Stein 269). Without any other guidance, Maggie surrenders to her family and Pete’s echoing command to “go teh hell” and becomes a prostitute because she is “too despondent to consider a sensible alternative” (Hapke, “The American Working Girl” 49). Maggie goes down the same path as so many other 19th century girls, who were destitute, abandoned, and uneducated. In 1872, Charles Loring Brace notes in The Dangerous Classes of New York that women in this situation “naturally and inevitably have become depraved” (118). In fact, 13% of women who became prostitutes in New York during the 19th century did so as a direct result of being seduced and abandoned (Sanger 488).

Crane does not create a scene to show Maggie’s initial solicitation. Instead in “Chapter 17,” he shows Maggie “several months after the last chapter” (Crane 62). The lapse of time throughout this chapter is also very vague, as it may cover “several months” or a few hours of one night. The duration of time is important to establish, because it will provide necessary information to understand how Crane depicts Maggie’s final night. If her movements occur over “several months,” this would illustrate her irreversible descent, but if her actions take place in a matter of hours, this would suggest that she is determined to get to the river. Many scholars debate the time frame of this chapter. For instance, Fredson Bowers and James Colvert suggest that the chapter is a “symbolic compression” of the previous months of Maggie’s life (Bowers and Colvert lxxxvi). If the chapter is a “symbolic compression” of time, then Crane is illustrating how Maggie begins her career in the Theater District, but eventually she is rejected and climbs down the social ladder until she reaches the bottom. In Robert Dowling and Donald Pizer’s
article, "A Cold Case File Reopened: Was Crane's Maggie Murdered or a Suicide?" Pizer agrees, and claims that Maggie’s movements happen “over a considerable span of time” (Dowling and Pizer 40). But Dowling disagrees and suggests, “only a short time has elapsed between paragraphs” (Dowling and Pizer 43). Pizer disputes Dowling’s analysis because a literal reading of the text loses the “effect of inevitability in the life of an East Side prostitute—the sense that every step is a step downward toward death” (Dowling and Pizer 49). Yet, I agree with Dowling that Maggie’s abrupt actions take place during one night because the text shows a consistent continuation of time to describe each step she takes. Crane’s description of Maggie’s pace is short and quick to indicate that she is in a hurry to reach her destination, which is revealed as Maggie progresses in her journey.

Crane describes Maggie as being one of the “painted cohorts of the city” (Crane 63) and the “crimson legions,” which are references to prostitution (Crane 65). Therefore, these descriptions confirm her status as a prostitute. She begins her walk through the prosperous streets of Broadway. She is dressed in a “handsome cloak” and delicately steps over a puddle with her “well-shod feet” to keep her clothes clean (Crane 63). The description of these decent clothes indicates that Maggie is an “experienced prostitute, who has apparently overcome her initial scruples…she seems to have been reasonably successful” in order to afford such luxuries (Cunliffe 37). By wearing this apparel, she tries to disguise her lower class social status, but she cannot conceal the physical signs caused from this harsh trade. Since Maggie is no longer “new” to prostitution (Crane 63), she is no longer the “pretty girl” that she was in her youth (Crane 18), and exhibits a repulsive appearance of an “‘old girl’” of the streets (Crane 63). Crane does not provide specific details about her repulsive appearance, but some male
passersby react with “a slight convulsive start” when they see her, which indicates that her hideous appearance is evident, or the men guiltily recognize her from previously accepting her solicitation (Crane 63).

During her walk, “she hurried forward through the crowd, as if intent upon reaching a distant home” (Crane 63). Her steps are “hurried,” as she walks with a purpose. The use of the word “intent” suggests that she is determined to reach a specific destination. Though the description of “a distant home” is not directly named, its vague meaning becomes clearer as Maggie proceeds toward the river. As she passes through the different classed neighborhoods, she “threw changing glances at men” (Crane 63). Some scholars like Joseph S. Salemi, suggest that Maggie’s eye contact indicates that she is “actively soliciting clients,” but I argue that Maggie’s “glances” are to acknowledge the passing men’s presence (58). She is not interested in finding a customer, because she does not stop to respond to or lure any of the men. Instead, she remains silent, so as not to provoke their further interest or pursuit. She is well aware “that if she walked with such apparent aimlessness, some men looked at her with calculating eyes. She quickened her step, frightened. As a protection, she adopted a demeanor of intentness as if going somewhere” (Crane 61). In the “glittering avenues” of Broadway she comes across “a tall young man, smoking a cigarette,” “a stout gentleman, with pompous and philanthropic whiskers” and “a belated man in business clothes” (Crane 63). When she enters the “darker blocks” in a seedier part of town, she passes “a young man in light overcoat and derby hat,” “a laboring man,” “a boy who was hurrying by with his hands buried in his overcoat,” “a drunken man,” “a man with blotched features” standing outside a saloon, “a ragged being with shifting, bloodshot eyes and grimy hands, and “a
huge fat man in torn and greasy garments” (Crane 63-64). Throughout her journey, she continues to avoid interacting with these men, because she is “intent upon reaching a distant home” at the river to die (Crane 63). Crane does not explain what motivates Maggie to make this trek. He does illustrate how the upper class men scowl at her, while the lower class men “smile” at her (Crane 64). It seems that Maggie is only able to attract the less appealing men in the “darker blocks” of the city, and if she wants to survive, she must service them (Crane 63). Since she avoids contact with these men, she evades further dishonor. With the array of socially declining men, Crane symbolically represents Maggie’s own decline and her ultimate desperation if she services them. Crane implies that she would rather die than resort to soliciting herself to them. As a result, she pursues a permanent end to her suffering through suicide.

Hapke notes that “the prostitute was not inhuman or better off dead if she could be reformed” (Hapke, “Maggie’s Sisters” 33). Since Crane fails to offer Maggie a way to be reformed, her only escape from the desolate Bowery slums is through death. In the 1893 edition, textual evidence suggests that the “huge fat man in greasy garments” murders Maggie (Crane 64). Yet, this character is absent from the 1896 revision, which suggests that Maggie asserts her free will to kill herself. The discrepancies between the two versions of Maggie’s death scene provoke the need for further analysis. By placing the varying texts side by side, there is a noticeable difference in the ending. The texts are here replicated and highlighted to illustrate the editorial changes:
She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things. Afar off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance. Street car bells jingled with a sound of merriment.

When almost to the river the girl saw a great figure. On going forward she perceived it to be a huge fat man in torn and greasy garments. His gray hair straggled down over his forehead. His small, bleared eyes, sparkling from amidst great rolls of red fat, swept eagerly over the girl’s upturned face. He laughed, his brown, disordered teeth gleaming under a gray, grizzled moustache from which beer-drops dripped. His whole body gently quivered and shook like that of a dead jelly fish. Chuckling and leering, he followed the girl of the crimson legions.

At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence (Crane 64-65).
Once Maggie arrives at the Hudson river, the events that follow have alternate endings in the 1893 and 1896 texts. In Crane’s initial portrayal of Maggie’s death in 1893, I argue that she is murdered. Having grown up in the dark region of the Bowery district and often been told to “go teh hell,” Maggie finally manages to find Hell (Crane 6). During her walk, she reaches the deepest, darkest pit of Hell as she enters “the blackness of the final block” (Crane 64). “A huge fat man,” who is a symbolic representation of a death-like figure, confronts her. He is pleased to see her and welcomes her to Hell with a “chuckling” acceptance (Crane 64). He is “huge” and overbearing in size with “red” colored skin and a gluttonous appetite, which is illustrated with his jiggling, “dead jelly fish” stomach (Crane 64-65). Then he takes her to the “deathly black hue” of the river (Crane 65). Though the actual method of murder is undisclosed, Maggie’s death is apparent because the sounds of life “died away to a silence,” as there is no beating heart or gasps for air (Crane 65). The fat man seems to be a vengeful force that punishes Maggie for transgressing social codes. As a result, Maggie is preserved in the role of the victim.

Critics still debate how these discrepancies should be read. For instance, Pizer suggests that the fat man “is the only one to accept her solicitation,” and “with her acceptance of him, she has reached the absolute darkness which he represents” and is compelled to kill herself (Dowling and Pizer 41). On the other hand, Robert Stallman writes in his 1955 article, “Stephen Crane’s Revision of Maggie: A Girl of the Streets,” that the fat man’s “attribute of ‘dead jelly fish’ prepares for the death by drowning that occurs subsequent to Maggie’s encountering him” (Stallman 535). I agree with Pizer that the fat man represents “absolute darkness,” because he exists in the most desolate part of
the city. I also agree with Stallman that when Crane compares the fat man to a “dead jelly fish” and places him near the “deathly black hue” of the river, Crane creates a scene of death (Crane 65). Since the fat man is also in direct proximity to Maggie when she dies, I agree that the fat man is the cause of Maggie’s death. As Elisabeth Panttaja suggests in The Naturalistic Inner-City Novel in America: Encounters with the Fat Man, “it is possible to infer that the fat man murdered Maggie” because he is the one “who takes actions: he laughs, he stares, he leers, and in the end he follows her right up to the lapping, oily water” (Giles 16). The fat man is an active force and Maggie remains passive prey. Crane’s journalistic investigation of New York prostitutes influenced him to “design the 1893 ending as a radical departure from the Victorian norm—unredeemed murder by the fat man” as a social criticism (Dowling and Pizer 46). Crane illustrates the dangers that an abandoned girl faces when she is denied a helping hand. Consequently, she endures further victimization until she is destroyed by the evil that lurks in the shadows of the city.

The revisions that Crane made in the 1896 text, which he edited under the advisement of the Appleton editors, contain significant alterations. He made changes to make the end more palatable with the exclusion of the fat man, and hence, the harsh method of murder. For example, the fat man does not meet Maggie when she enters the “blackness of the final block” (Crane 64). Instead, she is alone when she reaches the river. In this instance, the river is not an element of Hell but rather a means of escape.

Since Maggie “received her only education from her brother who taught her that she” could get married, to go to work or go to hell, she has limited knowledge about any other alternatives (Clerkin 49). Maggie is left to fend for herself and live in dire
circumstances. But in regards to her death, she is finally offered an opportunity to become an active participant in her life by making her own decision. Since she fails to improve her circumstances, it is logical that she feels depressed and hopeless, which are emotions often “associated with suicide” (Phillips and Smith 82). When she realizes that she will never experience the “joyous” noises from a distant crowd, as they are “unapproachable,” she understands that she can never escape the Bowery or prostitution (Crane 65). So she loses her will to live and takes it upon herself to end her life. At this point, Maggie metaphorically reaches her “distant home” with death.

Crane includes the outdated Victorian preference that a prostitute should be “destitute and drowned” by having Maggie die to reflect a realistic representation of a prostitute’s typically short life (Auerbach, “The Rise of the Fallen Woman” 33). Since Maggie is immersed in the river, the “water flowing over her body is the primordial act of purification or cleansing of the sin of death, the essence of true baptism” (Jung 146). Simone de Beauvoir indicates that women “are much more likely to drown themselves, like Ophelia, attesting the affinity of women with water, where, in the still darkness, it seems that life might find passive dissolution” (Beauvoir 678). Though drowning is not an aggressive means of suicide, Maggie is not passive in her death because she actively makes her trek to the river and decides to jump.

I agree with Dowling’s argument that Maggie’s choice to commit suicide offers her the chance to “achieve redemption by contrition” (Dowling, “Slumming” 77). Since Maggie is part of the crimson legion, her drowning reflects how the legion of “unclean spirits…choked in the sea,” and the immersion in water provides a cleansing of her body and soul as a form of spiritual purification (Bible, Mark 5:13). Though the fat man may
have drowned Maggie in the 1893 edition, this method of death with water is not a form of purification, but vicious assault. By purposefully hurrying on her path and not deterring from it in the 1896 revision, Crane implies that Maggie is intent on reaching the river. Crane proposes that Maggie actively makes a decision to take her next step and surrenders herself to the river current. Also, with suicide, Crane allows Maggie to preserve what is left of her dignity, as she dies before she is desperate enough to solicit the dregs of society.

Though Mary Jane Clerkin declares that Crane constructs the novel “entirely from the patriarchal perspective, beginning to end” (119), I dispute this claim. Crane makes the authorial decision to have Maggie endure abuse and destitution throughout the text to illustrate a realistic portrayal of a girl who is abandoned and destitute. It seems that Crane may have been inspired by a popular 1869 religious sermon by Thomas DeWitt Talmage, a minister of the Central Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York to write Maggie. Prior to the first publication of Maggie, Reverend Talmage gave a sermon about a fallen girl walking in the “street that leads to East river, at midnight, the end of the city dock, the moon shining down on the water making it look so smooth she wonders if it is deep enough” (Talmage 43). During this same speech Reverend Talmage tells about a girl named “Maggie” who is shunned by her family and goes into prostitution, but later they forgive her and welcome her home (Talmage 48). This sermon is too similar to Crane’s Maggie to be a coincidence. Crane replicates all of these elements in his novel, except forgiveness, to further describe the reality that many poverty-stricken girls and prostitutes did not receive forgiveness or escape destitution. Crane may be suggesting that the sermon promotes an unrealistic ending because most fallen women were socially
shunned and never recovered from it. In fact, many of the women who were desperate enough to enter prostitution would inevitably die as a result of this profession.

Regardless of which edition of Maggie is discussed, in both publications Crane does not allow Maggie a credible role model to offer her forgiveness or teach her how to improve her life. As a result, Maggie is not permitted the opportunity in life to repent like her namesake Mary Magdalene or Rachel in Work. Rather than creating a sentimental ending of atonement suggested in Talmage’s sermon, Crane allows Maggie to die in both versions of the novel as a means to illustrate a more realistic outcome of a prostitute’s life. Although in the later revision, Crane allows Maggie to reject being the victim and take her life into her own hands, her death is still a tragedy. Crane creates such a melancholy ending in both versions to critique how respectable society treats prostitutes as disposable objects by harshly reproaching them with intolerance and discrimination.
CHAPTER THREE

William Faulkner’s Sanctuary:
The Distortion of “Good” and “Bad” with Ruby Lamar and Temple Drake

After the passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, women increasingly began to question the social expectation that their “places were in homes, where men would provide for them” (Evans 202) and protect them from the “rude jostlings of the world” (Salter 167). In particular Northern women rose “out of the half-unconscious, half-servile state” and sought “to be something and to do something in the world besides waiting on other people” (Salter 166). This often meant that women would choose to work outside the home to financially support themselves. The term “New Woman” described the progressive women with the “attributes of independence, self-definition, physical adeptness, and mental acuity, qualities that allowed her to work, play, study, volunteer, and socialize with equal aplomb” (Rudnick 59). The image of the New Woman was the “flapper of the twenties: burdensome hair shingled off, knees bared, flaunting her new freedom to…drive a car, and drink, and smoke and enjoy sexual adventures—or talk about them” (Friedan 168).

Many women chose not to get married, and, instead worked to provide for themselves. In fact, 66% of working women were single in 1915 (U.S. Department of Labor 47). As the marriage rate declined, there was an increase in premarital sex. Earlier in the 19th century, this behavior was socially condemned, but by the early 20th century, 22% of US population condoned premarital sexual relations (Newcomb 661). This tolerance was due to “a decline in the efficacy of religious sanctions, and an increase in
the availability of contraceptives” (Newcomb 667). Since birth control was available, women were able to experiment with their sexuality with less fear of becoming pregnant. As a result, the “middle-class culture acknowledged the existence of female sexuality, and indeed prescribed sexual pleasure separate from procreative intention” (Evans 177). In fact, “women born between 1900 and 1910 were two and a half times as likely to have experienced premarital sexual intercourse as women born between 1890 to 1900” (White 333). This evidence suggests that sexual activity outside of marriage became more common and socially tolerated than in the Victorian era. As a result, the “traditional reticence about discussing sex and related topics in public was rapidly disappearing. In one sense the open and widespread discussion of prostitution was an important aspect of the breakdown of the conspiracy of silence that formally surrounded the discussion of sexual matters” (Connelly 19).

Though many Northern women enthusiastically embraced this newly found independence, Southern women, especially white Southern women, struggled against the Old South to free themselves from the cultural traditions, which were based on the social conventions of a patriarchal society. A “good” Southern woman was socially expected to “accept without question the doctrine of male superiority and authority,” while maintaining the traditional role of wife and mother (Scott 299). Placed on a pedestal and referred to as a Southern belle, this idealized woman “was the most sacred cultural icon of the antebellum South. She represented the best of Southern civilization, and her goodness offset its imperfections” (Sims 6). Southern society also expected her to follow the proper code of conduct, which emphasized “morals, manners, and behavior, heightened class differences and created visible distinctions among social groups” (Boyer
et al. 433). The “other” women, who rebelled against behaving like a “good” woman by demonstrating socially inappropriate behaviors, were classified as “bad” women. These “bad” women were considered unfit for “proper” society and were deemed outcasts. Often they were forced to socialize within the space of the “other” world, where the outcasts congregated to form an alternate society, which included prostitutes and bootleggers.

Prostitutes were the image of rebellion, as they defied “proper” society by engaging in “nonmarital sexual activity in exchange for money” (McCormick 83). By the early-20th century in America, “urban prostitution was tacitly tolerated, relatively undisturbed, and often tightly woven into a web of payoffs and corruption” because some police and other public officials were interested in making a profit from prostitution (Connelly 3). Since prostitution was still illegal, prostitutes could not get any judicial help. In order to continue working and not be prosecuted, these women paid officials and tolerated this scheme in order to maintain their business. In fact, a “young woman making $5 a week in a store could make $35 as a prostitute” (R. Rosenberg 24). Regardless of how much money a prostitute made, she was not accepted in polite society. Traditional society believed that prostitution was a “flagrant violation” of respectability and “mocked the ideals of civilized morality” (Connelly 10).

Early-20th century American authors like William Faulkner explored the social construction of “good” and “bad” women. As a Southern author, Faulkner specifically addressed the shifting identity of Southern womanhood and investigated the construction of their sexuality. In his novel, Faulkner does not strictly classify his female characters in the binary opposition of “good” or “bad.” Instead, he constructs his female characters in
“various contradictory ways” by making the “good” girl do bad things and the “bad” girl exhibit traits of integrity (Roberts 11). By doing this, Faulkner composes his female characters to suggest the idea that a “woman incarnates no stable concept,” as she is good, bad, and everything in between to varying degrees (Beauvoir 162). Faulkner illustrates the multiple dimensions of women in his 1931 novel Sanctuary. He constructs Temple Drake and Ruby Lamar outside the Old South’s limited roles of virgin, wife, or whore. Temple, an ostensible Southern belle, experiments with her sexuality, while the reformed prostitute, Ruby, commits to having a monogamous relationship. Though Faulkner challenges the Old South’s rigid classifications of women, he also illustrates that the traditional society does not tolerate women who deviate from their assigned identities. At the end of the novel, Faulkner returns Temple to her original role as a “respectable” girl, and he implies that Ruby returns to prostitution, as a means to criticize the Old South’s resistance to change.

Though Temple and Ruby are born into different socioeconomic circumstances, at different times each lives in a brothel in Memphis, and they are judged differently in a patriarchal society, which considers sexualized women a threat to male authority. Temple is a seventeen-year-old college student who comes from a well-to-do family and is expected to maintain the virtuous reputation of a Southern belle. Though Temple is initially portrayed as a respectable woman, she defies this role by sneaking out at night to have clandestine rendezvous with boys. One night, Temple ends up at a bootlegger’s house and is raped by Popeye. Afterwards, Popeye takes her to Memphis where he subjects her to depraved sexual acts. In contrast, Ruby comes from a lower class family. As a young adult, she disobeys her father by sneaking out to meet her lover. When
Ruby’s father finds out, he shoots her lover and disowns her. Since Ruby has very few options, she ends up prostituting herself for money. Eventually, she assumes the role of a wife and mother. Faulkner displaces the dichotomy of angel/whore by disrupting their distinctive boundaries. He constructs Temple and Ruby to reflect the emerging identity of independent women who struggle to cope with their sexuality in a repressive society. Yet, Faulkner critiques how this same society pressures Temple and Ruby to resume their assigned positions. For instance, Faulkner illustrates how the defense attorney interrogates Temple about being raped in open court to define her as a helpless victim. At the same time, Temple’s story is a cautionary tale to teach other girls that being disobedient and sneaking out at night may cause them to experience a similar punishment or brutalization. As for Ruby, she is not allowed to enjoy her monogamous relationship because her partner is wrongly executed for a crime he did not commit, and she is relentlessly harassed for her past transgressions.

Many scholars have analyzed these controversial issues in Sanctuary. For example, Elizabeth Binggeli suggests in “Worse than Bad: Sanctuary, the Hays Office and the Genre of Abjection” that “Sanctuary is fundamentally shaped by anxiety related to the instability of white identity, and in particular, white female identity” (88). In “William Faulkner and the Social Conscience,” Dayton Kohler argues that Faulkner writes about the “destruction of the old order in the South and the further corruption of the descendants of that order by a ruthless and competitive industrial society,” and that “he is committed to the historic predicament of his region” (120). In “Moonshine and Magnolias: The Story of Temple Drake and The Birth of a Nation,” Deborah Barker states that Temple is a combination of the “frivolous elements of the flapper and belle
and is forced to ‘pay’ for her frivolous behavior through sexual violence” (151). Joanne V. Creighton analyzes Temple in her article, “Self-Destructive Evil in Sanctuary,” and explains that “encased in the sanctuary of social privilege, Temple has not a developed capacity for moral discrimination; her amorality is already an aspect of evil” (266). In Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner, Deborah Clarke writes that as Faulkner “investigates female sexuality, there seems to be much less respect for women” (52).

I agree with Binggeli that Faulkner illustrates that female identity is unstable in Sanctuary, and that the novel is “shaped by anxiety” because Faulkner reflects how the Old Southern society is fearful of sexualized women. Faulkner criticizes how the Old South is resistant to change. Since prostitution is the “fullest patriarchal reduction of women,” I believe Faulkner uses prostitution to critique the social treatment of sexualized women (Barry 22). He illustrates how the Old South would prefer sexually rebellious women to be punished for disrupting the social order because this society expects women to be subordinate to men. It may seem that the violent treatment of Temple and Ruby is a misogynistic endeavor, but Faulkner is analyzing “the myth of virginity, the fear of sexuality, the dichotomy in which women are either Madonna/virgins or sexual objects,” as a means of understanding how society evaluates women (Basset 73). In his characterization of Temple and Ruby, Faulkner shows how they struggle to free themselves from their restrictive society. Yet, he suggests that a woman cannot maintain a rebellious position because the Old Southern society will relentlessly persecute a woman until she resumes her assigned role.

Faulkner’s construction of Temple Drake illustrates how a woman who exhibits risqué or “bad” behavior disrupts the social order of a patriarchal society. Though
Temple is a young Southern belle from a prominent Southern family, she rebels against the traditional role of wife/mother and the idealized image of the Southern belle. As a result of her rebelliousness, Temple is on “probation” at her college, but her desire for adventure is not squelched (Faulkner 43). Though Temple’s brother, Hubert, threatens her that if he caught her “with a drunk man, he’d beat the hell out of” her, one night she goes out with a young gentleman of the same social class named Gowan Stevens, who is determined to buy alcohol (Faulkner 42). During this time, Prohibition is in effect and Gowan decides to buy alcohol from Lee Goodwin, a bootlegger, at the Old Frenchman’s Bend. Upon arriving at the house, they face a group of brutal men. Though Temple senses the danger of her situation, she assumes that the men follow the same code of conduct that “respectable” men like Gowan endorse. But, Popeye, a fierce gangster, eventually rapes her with a corncob and takes her to live in a Memphis brothel. Faulkner suggests that outside the boundaries of polite society, Temple’s behavior is no longer read as innocent flirtations, but a provocation to abuse her.

Faulkner implies that the privileged social class fails to educate women on how to protect themselves in order to keep women in a position of being helpless and fully dependent on men. Since Temple is raised to be a Southern belle, she is expected to get married and have children. The process of “finding a husband” and “becoming a wife” creates a marriage marketplace where women are the sexual objects on display for purchase. Women are defined by their value to a patriarchal society. “The mother commands use value (she is valuable for her ability to reproduce), the prostitute is good for usage and exchange, and the virgin constitutes ‘pure exchange value’ (she is valuable for what she signifies)” (Gwin 58). As a result, Temple’s virginity is a highly sought
after commodity, but Temple is too naïve to comprehend the imminent dangers of 
predatory men. From an early age, she is taught that she is a sacred vessel, as her name 
suggests. Faulkner implies that Temple’s social class allows her certain privileges, and 
she believes that she should be cherished and protected by gentlemen. Faulkner 
questions this notion of the “good” girl by having Temple exhibit questionable behavior. 
For instance, she seduces boys and manipulates them to satisfy her whimsical need for 
attention, as she has “a taste for the illicit under certain controlled conditions” (Singal 
155). Singal explains, “Even before her rape, Faulkner is saying Temple’s purity was an 
ilusion” because she is “replete with animalistic sexual drives, a voracious ego, and other 
attributes supposedly absent in the Southern lady” (158). Faulkner preserves her image 
as a virgin within the controlled environment of civilized society to illustrate how a 
Southern belle and gentleman must adhere to a moral code of conduct. Faulkner 
demonstrates this adherence to the code by having Temple stop any sexual contact before 
actual intercourse occurs. So regardless of Temple’s intentions, “her respectability and 
theoretically her purity” will be maintained (Page 78). By doing this, Faulkner is testing 
the boundaries of “respectability.” Faulkner suggests that such a woman could use her 
position in an upper class family to prevent the boys from being more persistent or raping 
her. When she feels threatened, “she would simply invoke her social status through a set 
of magic words—‘My father’s a judge’—and the overeager suitor would back off” 
(Singal 155). Temple’s repetition of claiming her father is a judge “constitutes a 
linguistic attempt to render herself beyond violation, relying on her belief that judges’ 
daughters don’t get raped. She counts on class identification for protection” (Clarke 71). 
Faulkner suggests that the judge’s law and order is upheld in polite society. As a result,
Temple maintains a fine line between enacting her promiscuous behavior and preserving her virginity. Faulkner implies that the Old South creates a sense of security for privileged women, as gentlemen are expected to protect them under any circumstance.

Though Temple defies the traditional social mores, she is ill equipped to deal with life outside the bounds of traditional Southern society in the rural environment of the Old Frenchman’s Place. The house is described as “a gutted ruin rising gaunt and stark out of a grove of unpruned cedar trees,” “built before the Civil War, and “set in the middle of a tract of land; of cotton fields and gardens and lawns long since going back to jungle” (Faulkner 4). Faulkner describes how the plantation house is decayed to “a gutted ruin.” “Built before the Civil War,” the house suggests a decayed vision of the Old South. As the South was defeated in the war, the traditional ideals have become outdated and disregarded. This social devastation is illustrated in the collapse of this historic house. Eventually, it becomes an uncivilized wilderness with an “unpruned” landscape. Faulkner’s use of the word “jungle” suggests that there is an aspect of “lawlessness” because the Old Frenchman’s Place is inhabited by the unlegislated underworld of bootleggers and a prostitute (Roberts 131). As a result, the judge’s law and authority is ineffective. In this environment, Temple is outside the privileged society and enters an unknown world, in which she is no longer the “judge’s daughter, an object to be venerated, but an object to be penetrated” (Roberts 133).

Many scholars debate why Temple remains at the Old Frenchman’s Place. Though she runs through the house, she fails to escape to safety. In William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist, Daniel Singal claims that Faulkner does not let Temple leave
because “like a moth fatally attracted to a source of light, she flickers to and from the house, terrified of what may happen but eager to find out what it would be like” (156).

Irving Malin takes this idea a step further in *William Faulkner: An Interpretation*. He suggests that Faulkner illustrates that “Temple wants the opportunity to fall so that she can become completely immoral” (Malin 33). Finally, Kevin Railey argues that Faulkner constructs Temple as “inherently dirty and should be punished harshly” (79). I disagree with these arguments. I suggest that Temple is really just apprehensive about being at the Old Frenchman’s Place, but she is even more afraid of what dangers may await her in the darkness of the “jungle” outside. She continues to stay in the house because she expects Gowan to protect her. She also trusts that the men will drive her to town, as she is unaware that they do not follow her same code of conduct. She is unprepared to deal with this situation because her family “kept [her] in absolute ignorance of the meaning and importance of sex” (Goldman 190). As a result of her upper class upbringing, she is sheltered her from the harsher circumstances of life. Faulkner suggests that regardless of a woman’s upbringing, she is biologically conditioned to experience sexual urges, but without sufficient guidance to avoid sexually provocative situations she is susceptible prey to predatory men.

Unlike Temple, Ruby is not privileged; she comes from a lower class family, whose members do not hesitate to react with violence. When the paternal figures in Ruby’s life discover that she has a secret lover, Frank, they threaten to “kill the goddam son of a bitch” (Faulkner 44). After Ruby’s father shoots Frank, he tells her to “‘get down there and sop your dirt, you whore’” (Faulkner 45). By using the phrase “sop your dirt,” Ruby’s father is telling her to clean up the mess she has made. He does not claim
any responsibility for the murder. Instead, he blames Ruby for causing the violence as a result of her “bad” behavior. In this scene, Faulkner illustrates how Ruby’s family rejects her for causing her own “fall” by having sex with Frank. Though her family is upset about her behavior, her “fall” does not shock her community because she already resides in the lower strata of society and is already close to reaching the bottom. Without anyone to give Ruby a helping hand, she must rely on herself for survival. Since she has limited training and few options for work, she becomes a prostitute. Faulkner implies that her father must take some responsibility for her “fall.”

Faulkner uses the name Ruby as a symbolic representation of her character. As a precious gem, her name signifies “love” and “loyalty” (Orient 153). However, Ruby can also signify “wrath in the degree that is deadly sin” (Orient 153). Additionally, the name is a shade of red, which represents the stain of her “fall.” The association with this color also symbolizes her prostitution in the popular red-light district on Manuel Street in Memphis. Faulkner includes some of these meanings in his construction of Ruby’s character. He shows that she has a passionate lust for her lover because she is willing to defy her father. But she is not wrathful, as she does not retaliate against her father for killing her lover. Instead, she exhibits kindness toward others, love for her baby, and loyalty to Lee Goodwin. Although Ruby takes on the traditional role of wife/mother, she is not accepted into respectable society.

A sexualized women or “‘the red woman’” is a threat to the patriarchy because “she shakes off the constraining white garments, in any number of ways, revealing both her own and man’s need and desire for fusion,” and “she threatens man’s ability to control himself” (Railey 81). Yet, men and their financial investment maintain
prostitution. As Laurie Shrage notes, prostitution “involves the commoditization of sex or, more specifically, the commoditization of the sexuality of gendered and classed individuals” (91). Kevin Railey further argues that “Faulkner clearly links female sexuality to the lower class,” and that fear of female sexuality is “directly connected to the patriarch’s fear of the threat from the lower class” (83). I agree with both claims, because as a lower class woman Ruby can earn more money being a prostitute and exploiting her sexuality than she could at most legitimate jobs.

Even though Faulkner has Ruby adapt to the profession of prostitution, she is not defined by her career choice because she is simply making a living for herself. Regardless, Faulkner shows that Ruby is morally judged by traditional society as “bad” because she does not conform to the image of a “good” woman, who is virtuous, timid, and modest. Instead, Ruby’s virtue is tainted from rebelling against her father’s rules and having premarital sex. She is also uninhibited with her actions and words, which are best illustrated in her conversation with Temple. Though Ruby exhibits these unlady-like behaviors, Faulkner does not characterize her as a “bad” woman. Even though Faulkner characterizes Ruby as a common law wife and mother, he does not construct her as a traditional wife/mother. Taking up residence on the outskirts of society in the Old Frenchman’s Bend, Faulkner shows that Ruby is not under the restrictions of the traditional patriarchal society, in which she is expected to marry. Though Faulkner refers to her as “Mrs. Goodwin” in parts of the text, she never legally marries her lover and father of her baby, Lee Goodwin (Faulkner 84). Remaining in a common-law union, they do not follow the rules of traditional society. “American law generally defined marriage as a permanent monogamous union between a fit man and a fit woman of the age of
consent, designed for mutual love and support, and for mutual procreation and protection” (Witte 194). Since Ruby and Lee are outcasts and operate outside of the law, they “have long since chosen not to be bound within the structure of this society. Alienated as they are, the rewards or punishments of the community carry little weight with them” (Moore 119).

Regardless, Ruby embraces the traditional marriage vows, for she loves, honors, and obeys Lee. When Lee demands Ruby to quit “jazzing,” which is another word for prostitution, she obeys (Faulkner 45). She loves him so much that she accepts being poor and giving up her independence to be with him. By doing this, Faulkner illustrates how her love is more powerful for her than obtaining material objects, as she gives up “three fur coats” and even “gave one of them to a woman in an alley by a saloon” (Faulkner 47). Instead she wears a “faded calico dress” and “a worn pair of man’s brogans, unlaced, [that] flapped when she moved” (Faulkner 5). Faulkner has Ruby wear masculine shoes to characterize her as a “degendered woman” (Davidson 144). Instead of using her sexuality for a profit, Ruby is monogamously committed to Lee. She continues to show her love, as she honors Lee by remaining at his side when he is falsely accused of murdering his friend, Tommy.

Ruby exhibits additional redeeming qualities by being self-sacrificing, truthful, and protective of others. For example, she sacrifices everything to be with Lee. Besides giving up her lucrative career in prostitution, she works two legitimate jobs, including waitressing, to pay for a lawyer when Lee is in jail. She also forgives Lee after he has an affair with another woman. Ruby confesses, “‘I’ve done everything for him. I’ve been in the dirt for him. I’ve put everything behind me and all I asked was to be left alone,’” as
she enjoys the solace of living in the “jungle” of the Old Frenchman’s Bend. Though the house is a “hellish inversion of the spaces pictured in the ads” for the modern housewife, Ruby makes it her home (Gleason 325). Faulkner continues to illustrate her consideration for others by making her a “‘mother’ of the parodic family of bootleggers” (Roberts 131). Instead of worrying about her own needs, she expends all her energy in caring for others, including “‘crimps and sprungs and feebs’” (Faulkner 5).

Ruby’s “knowledge of men and her capacity for self-giving love make her the counterpoint of the superficial, naïve, and selfish Temple Drake” (Page 89). Faulkner best illustrates their character differences when they first cross paths. Initially, Ruby is frustrated with Temple, but she makes it a point to expose Temple’s frivolous behavior. Ruby tells Temple:

“Oh, I know your sort,” the woman said. “Honest women. Too good to have anything to do with common people. You’ll slip out at night with the kids, but just let a man come along.” She turned the meat. “Take all you can get, and give nothing. ‘I’m a pure girl; I dont do that.’ You’ll slip out with the kids and burn their gasoline and eat their food, but just let a man so much as look at you and you faint away because your father the judge and your four brothers might not like it. But just let you get in a jam, then who do you come crying to? to us, the ones that are not good enough to lace the judge’s almighty shoes.” (Faulkner 44)

With this dialogue, Ruby mocks Temple for acting like a “pure girl.” Though Temple does not have sex, she taunts and teases boys so that she can “burn their gasoline and eat their food.” Yet, when Temple is confronted by a potent male, and not a polite
gentleman, she will “faint away.” Ruby points out that Temple is helpless without the patriarchal protection of her father and brothers. Ruby also realizes how Temple judges their socioeconomic differences. Faulkner illustrates that Ruby accepts her lower class status, but sees that Temple judges her as “not [being] good enough to lace the judge’s almighty shoes.” Yet, Faulkner has Temple expect Ruby and the men to do what she wants because of her privileged status. Temple is too naive to realize the danger that she is in, especially with the many brutish, bootlegging men at the Old Frenchman Bend. Regardless of Temple’s sense of entitlement, Ruby is truthful and warns Temple about the peril she faces for staying at the house. Also in this passage, Faulkner conveys the message that the rules of society vary depending upon the environment. For instance, as Temple is outside the bounds of polite society, her risqué behavior makes her vulnerable to danger. She is naïve and fails to understand that the bootleggers are motivated by their predatory instincts, rather than a code of etiquette.

Though Ruby exhibits hostility toward Temple, she is still compelled to protect Temple from the brutal men because she senses Temple’s vulnerability. Since Temple’s protective family has sheltered her, she has not had the opportunity to develop into a mature woman. Faulkner illustrates her child-like nature when she “identifies much more easily with Ruby’s baby than with Ruby” (Page 80). Even though Ruby lives in utter poverty, she does her best to protect her baby and Temple. For instance, Ruby keeps the baby in a box behind the stove “‘so the rats cant get to him’” (Faulkner 12). Ruby tries to do the same for Temple, as she guards Temple from the men throughout the night. Ruby takes Temple to the “crib” in the barn to sleep (Faulkner 65). A “crib” is also a term used to describe a baby’s bed. Temple assumes the child-like role, and Ruby continues her
role as the mother, who watches over Temple while she sleeps. In the morning, Ruby has
to resume her domestic duties and leaves Temple in the barn, but she makes sure to
station Tommy to guard the entrance of the crib. However, Ruby’s effort is futile
because she is unable to prevent Temple’s rape.

Constructing Ruby’s character, Faulkner reinvents the iconic Madonna image by
taking the traditional role of mother as protector and upholder of morality, and merging
this image with the prostitute, who is typically ill mannered and resilient, as he highlights
the image of Ruby carrying her half dead baby. “In Ruby, Faulkner collapses the stories
of Madonna and magdalen; she is not subject to the travesty of rape, because she offers
up her own body as sacrifice—it need not be conquered” (Roberts 132). When Ruby
carries her baby son, Faulkner recreates an inverted image of the Virgin Mary cradling
baby Jesus in her arms. Symbolically, a baby is a symbol of hope and new life, but
Ruby’s baby is the opposite. As a result of Lee and Ruby’s unholy wedlock, the “child is
far from being immaculately conceived” and symbolizes their socially marred union
(Clarke 55). Faulkner reflects this in the deterioration of the baby’s health. The baby is
sickly and only promises death and decay. As Ruby holds the child, “it lay in a sort of
drugged immobility, like the children which beggars on Paris streets carry, its pinched
face slick with faint moisture, its hair a damp whisper of shadow across its gaunt, veined
skull, a thick crescent of white showing beneath its lead-colored eyelids” (Faulkner 92).
Even though Ruby has retired from prostitution, Faulkner indicates that her past cannot
be washed away. Since the sin is stained on her, it is unavoidable. Faulkner does not
offer Ruby any other options for absolution, so she is forced to endure the consequences
of her past actions. Since the Old South views a prostitute as an abomination, she is only
able to reproduce a baby that symbolically represents her past sins. Faulkner critiques how society continues to find Ruby contemptible, regardless of her efforts to assume the role of wife/mother.

Faulkner critiques the Old South’s religious hypocrisy, as the Christian denomination of Southern Baptists in Sanctuary fail to forgive Ruby for her past transgressions. In particular, Faulkner includes a devout widow, Narcissa, who condemns Ruby for being an ex-prostitute and an unwed mother. Faulkner implies that Narcissa’s condemnation mirrors the harsh opinion shared by Southern society and religion. The name Narcissa is an allusion to the Greek mythological figure Narcissus, who was obsessed with his beauty and was exceedingly proud. Faulkner includes this allusion to show how Narcissa is narcissistic because she is obsessed with maintaining what she believes is a perfect image of herself, her family, and her community by relentlessly driving Ruby out of town. Faulkner shows his contempt for Narcissa’s unwarranted persecution by demonstrating Ruby is innocently trying to protect her family. Narcissa “represents conventional society which, in its effort to hide its inner corruption, is led to regard outward respectability more highly than inward purity” (Page 72). Narcissa also represents the social opinion of her time. For example, in 1914, the director of the Southern Baptist Mission claimed that a prostitute’s “moral depravity was the chief cause of their situation; their life reflected their sexual desires” (Keller 119). Also during this time, the congregation “engaged in high profile campaigns to eliminate alcohol, prostitution, and other social ills from their communities through both moral shaming and legislative enactments” (Harvey 217). Faulkner suggests that many Southern Baptists like Narcissa blame a woman for entering prostitution because they
believe a woman must be morally depraved to do so. Living in a society that encourages women to be sexually repressed women, Narcissa seeks to marginalize and exclude Ruby.

By living on the outskirts of society, Ruby is able to avoid social persecution. But when she enters the privileged society to help Lee’s defense, Faulkner points out that she cannot escape the church ladies’ persecution. In fact, one of the church ladies claims that Ruby violates the sphere of polite society and that Ruby and Lee “should both be burned” at the stake for sinning and having an illegitimate child (Faulkner 102). Though Ruby has already abandoned a career in prostitution and conforms to the role of wife/mother, the church ladies classify her as “bad” and will not forgive her for her past transgressions. They promote the traditional belief that “either you are a lady or you are not” and “those who have fallen from purity have it written on them, a scarlet mark, or an odor” (Roberts 109). Though Ruby does not have the refined skills of a traditional wife/mother, she does her best to take care of and protect those in need. Regardless, Ruby accepts the social treatment she receives and says, “I guess I’ve got just what was coming to me. There’s no use fighting it”’ (Faulkner 98). By depicting Ruby as resigned to the callous treatment of the Southern Baptists, who disregard her effort, Faulkner attacks the hypocritical use of religion for creating “a deep chasm between social forms and moral value” by maintaining Temple’s honor “as the foundation of its ethical code,” but punishing Ruby for her prior indiscretion and ignoring her recent improvement (Creighton 266).

Regardless of Ruby’s efforts to protect Temple, Popeye shoots Tommy and desecrates Temple’s honor. Temple is ignorant about how to protect herself. When Popeye sneaks into the crib, Temple is frightened and her “primary tactic for defending
herself is a regression to the innocence of childhood” (Singal 156). Temple sits “motionless, her mouth open a little” and with “her legs straight before her, her hands limp and palm-up on her lap,” indicating her helplessness (Faulkner 80-81). This portrayal of Temple as a child-like victim heightens the intensity of her grotesque victimization, as Popeye rapes her with a corncob. The manner in which “Popeye performs his violation of Temple seems anything but sexual; his behavior seems more rooted in a desire to punish than to have sexual relations” (Railey 77). Popeye’s violence is a “manner of conveying male hostility, both toward the female (who is sex) and toward sexuality itself (which is her fault)” (Millett 307). By violating Temple, Popeye shatters Temple’s porcelain world.

After the rape, Temple is in a state of shock, as her “face looked like a sleepwalker’s as she swayed limply to the lurching of the car” that Popeye is driving (Faulkner 109). Though Temple has an opportunity to escape from Popeye at the gas station, she does not run away, for she is too exhausted to physically escape and too traumatized to mentally process the possibility of it. Her compliance is reminiscent of her time spent at the Old Frenchman’s Bend, although, in this scene, Temple does not frantically run around. She no longer has anything to fear because she has already been caught and defiled. Resigning her to the role of the victim, she figuratively wears the stain of a fallen woman and literally bleeds from between her legs, which is an indication that “sex is inescapably dirty,” even though she is forced against her will to have sex (Millett 309). Regardless, she becomes an outcast to proper society and begins her new life in a Memphis brothel. Since she is no longer in the predictable environment of respectable society, she is initially cautious of this “other” world. Eventually, Temple
adjusts to this new lifestyle in the brothel and experiments with her sexuality. By doing this, Faulkner reverses her role from the virgin to the whore, who acquires a gluttonous appetite for alcohol, sex, and danger. As a result, Faulkner reveals how a woman, even a Southern belle, craves sexual freedom. Faulkner also illustrates the conflicting emotions a woman can have toward sex, as she breaks through the floodgates of repression to enjoy her sexuality, but at the same time, she knows that this behavior is considered “bad” in a respectable society. Faulkner suggests that the Old South discourages women from enjoying sex, but the fallen woman and prostitute are allowed to take pleasure in their sexuality.

Temple becomes accustomed to the special treatment she receives at the brothel. She receives lavish gifts from Popeye, motherly care from the madam, and the personal service of the maid, who cleans up after her and serves her meals in bed. At first Temple declines the women’s offers of alcohol in “Chapter 18,” but by “Chapter 24” she becomes dependent upon it. Initially, the alcohol helps Temple deal with her situation. Regardless of the attention that she receives, Temple is never satisfied, as she has a voracious appetite for these new pleasures. Since Popeye is impotent, he is physically unable to have sex, which is why he used a corncob to rape Temple. Popeye introduces Temple to an able-bodied man named Red, a representation of intense insatiable passion and lust. The three engage in erotic activities, in which Popeye is the voyeur, Red is his surrogate, and Temple is the object of their sexual affection. Though Michael Wainwright suggests that Temple is in a “state of unconscious submission” (158). Faulkner indicates that Temple consciously seeks out Red for companionship. Diane Roberts claims that Temple is a symbolic image of Sleeping Beauty because “at the
brothel she spends almost all her time in bed, asleep, drunk, or having sex with Red” (134). With these basic human functions, Faulkner illustrates how Temple is liberated from the oppression of being a Southern Belle and adjusts to her new life of uninhibited sexual gratification. Faulkner makes it a point to confine Temple within the private space of the brothel bedroom to critique how the Old South does not accept the presence of a sexualized woman in polite society. This idea is demonstrated in the characterization of Narcissa, who upholds this standard by persecuting anyone who fails to adhere to a respectable code of conduct. Faulkner does not condemn sexualized women, but criticizes how the Old South classifies them as whores and ostracizes them for not repressing their natural behavior.

Eventually, Temple gets bored of being confined in the bedroom. She becomes frantically stir crazy like a feral animal that is freshly caged. She tests the limits of what she can get away with in her new role as a whore. Faulkner creates a double meaning in critiquing the Old South by letting Temple have pleasurable sex. Instead of using her sexuality to persuade the men to do what she wants, she resorts to her prior tactics of a spoiled child. When Popeye is not swayed by her child-like pleas, and she does not get her way, she resorts to having temper tantrums and ruining her lavish gifts. Though Faulkner continues to characterize her as child-like, she is no longer scared of Popeye. Rather, Faulkner takes the patriarchal role of her father the judge, and projects this role of paternal authority onto Popeye, who is a powerful figure in the underworld. On occasion, Temple even calls Popeye “‘daddy’” (Faulkner 184). Faulkner creates this parental shift to highlight that Temple is incessantly dependant on her father the judge, and she is lost
without a male authority figure. As a result, Temple and Popeye form a dysfunctional relationship, in which Temple looks to Popeye to fulfill the role of her father.

In Faulkner’s underworld, male authority can be brutal. For instance, Temple is aware that Popeye promises to kill Red if she sees him again, but she is still determined to see Red. It seems that Temple antagonizes this situation in order to provoke the men to fight over her. She is no longer bored because she is entertained by the thrill that possible danger will erupt. This mischievous behavior is similar to how she acts at the beginning of the novel, when she sneaks out at night to have secret rendezvous with boys. The major difference in this scene is that Popeye is aware of her rebellious nature and is determined to maintain his authority over her. Popeye confronts the issue by taking Temple to see Red. During the drive, Temple begins to taunt Popeye by saying “‘He’s a better man than you are!’” and insults him further about his impotency, “‘You’re not even a man…when you can’t even—When you had to bring a real man in to—’” (Faulkner 184). Popeye responds with aggressive behavior, as he tries to silence her by covering her mouth with his hand. Initially, she struggles to free herself, but she eventually “ceased struggling, but she continued to twist her head from side to side” and “began to whimper, moaning behind his hand, drooling upon his fingers” (Faulkner 185). In this scene, Faulkner reveals how Temple responds to Popeye’s brutality by becoming sexually aroused. This interaction illustrates an odd portrait of a sadomasochistic foreplay. At first Temple struggles, but then she only pretends to resist as she becomes more sexually excited.

Faulkner continues to reveal how Temple tries to provoke Popeye with the threat of violence by having Red hurt him. But when she notices that her face does not show
any evidence of Popeye’s handprint, she is disappointed. She continues her dramatic performance as a helpless victim when she encounters Red by trying to convince him to save her from Popeye. Instead of keeping the men apart, she enjoys the heightened sense of animosity as the two men vie for her attention. She is excited at the possibility that Popeye might fulfill his promise of killing Red. Faulkner illustrates Temple’s pleasure as she is “‘on fire’” with “her body arching slowly backward as though faced by an exquisite torture” (Faulkner 190). This sexual excitement shows how Temple adapts to her new role and solicits her sexuality as a means of power. Since she transfers her desire for male protection from her lawful father the judge to her new lawless daddy, the gangster, she tries to rebel against Popeye’s authority and instigate his anger. Signal claims that Temple’s “entry into the criminal underworld serves to unleash a host of natural instincts that she has had little experience in controlling. It is thus not her affinity for evil but her very innocence that makes her so vulnerable, giving rise to the intricate mix of terror and fascination, resistance and surrender that she displays” (Singal 155). As a result, her behavior is directly influenced by her circumstance. She is no longer surrounded with Southern gentlemen or their chivalry, but Popeye’s brutality. In turn, she responds with violence. By doing this, Faulkner demonstrates “that it is impossible to wall off the darker impulses of human nature, either in society or within the self” because everyone consists of varying degrees of behavior that is socially good and unacceptable, even the presumably respectable girl (Singal 162).

Though society associates virgins with being “good” and whores with being “bad,” Faulkner distorts this classification to show that the boundaries of “good” and “bad” are not absolute. Faulkner illustrates these contrasting characterizations in the
courtroom at Lee’s trial, who has been accused of murdering Tommy and raping Temple. As Ruby testifies about the night in question, she responds honestly and expects justice to prevail because Lee is innocent of the charges. Ruby goes so far as to offer herself as payment to the lawyer who defends Lee. Regardless of the truth, Temple tells another story, in which Lee is guilty of both charges. She claims that she saw Lee shoot Tommy and then made his way into the crib to rape her. Since Temple is a member of the higher social class, her testimony voids anything Ruby says, because Ruby’s word as a marginalized character is not valued. Ruby’s intentions are clear, as she just wants to save Lee, but Faulkner fails to explain what precisely motivates Temple to commit perjury. Though Temple returns to the role of a respectable girl, she is not honest on the witness stand. Instead, Temple is too consumed with herself to consider how her actions might affect innocent people. She plays the innocent victim to avoid disclosing her sexual escapades with Red at the brothel and avoid being found at fault. On the other hand, Ruby is the direct opposite, as she is self-sacrificing and takes responsibility for her actions. Though she acts outside the bounds of what society considers proper behavior, Ruby tries her best to uphold a genuine morality to do what is right and help others in need. As a result, Faulkner conveys the message that regardless of someone’s socioeconomic status, everyone is capable of exhibiting signs of goodness and malevolence.

If Temple were to state the truth on the witness stand, “she would have to summon an incredible amount of courage to tell the truth that would lead to exposing her actions in Memphis, courage beyond what the world ought to demand” (Tebbetts 58). Temple is not prepared to do this because she would then have to confess about her
relationship with Popeye and her participation in Red’s death. So by not mentioning Popeye, Temple is able to hide her previous relationship with him and protect her reputation. Ultimately, she preserves Popeye’s reputation as a virile, which suggests that she shows a subtle allegiance to him. On her way to the witness stand, Temple carries the platinum bag, which is one of the many luxurious gifts that Popeye gave her. Temple also slips up when the District Attorney asks her where she lives, and she quickly answers Memphis, which is where she lived with Popeye. Joseph R. Urgo suggests that she does this because “Popeye ‘fools’ Temple into thinking he has had sexual intercourse with her and therefore has some claim on her” (Urgo 438). Another possible explanation for naming Lee as the perpetrator may be because she blames Lee for not taking her home that night, so “she identifies culpability with the source of her suffering and names the man who set in motion the chain of her terror as the guilty one” (Urgo 444). Nevertheless, the text does not provide a definitive answer. On the other hand, Faulkner reveals that the icon of the Southern belle is a false ideal because even the “good” girl is capable of unpressed “bad” behavior.

By reentering respectable society, Temple is forced under the patriarchal protection of her father and brothers. Her father’s influence is apparent in the courtroom scene. While Temple delivers her testimony, she is “detached and cringing, her gaze fixed on” her father (Faulkner 226). She sits with her hands “motionless, palm-up on her lap” (Faulkner 226). Since this is the same position she exhibits before she is raped, it suggests that she is restored to a state of helplessness. By recreating this pose, Faulkner implies that Temple’s presence on the witness stand is another form of violation, as she must retell the circumstances surrounding the rape. Faulkner has the District Attorney
announce to the court that Temple is a “ruined, defenseless child” (Faulkner 229). This description is used to portray her as a victim of the crime. Though she is no longer a virgin, she is blameless in the eyes of Southern society, who has not only assigned her the role of a proper Southern belle, but also believes she could not possibly disgrace her family or tarnish her reputation by willingly participating in lurid sex acts. In essence, the District Attorney’s speech provokes the court to sympathize with this portrait of Temple and reaffirm her honor as an obedient and innocent girl.

This image of innocence is reinforced by how Temple leaves the witness stand in a “shrinking and rapt abasement” and clasps her father’s hand to leave (Faulkner 230). When she drops her platinum bag, her father responds by kicking it “into the corner, where a spittoon sat,” which signifies that her old life is thrown in the garbage and she can resume a socially respectable life under her father’s protection. Consequently, Temple returns to her respectable family as “a Drake-unit, owned by her father, not by herself” (Tebbetts 47). This crushes her spirit because she is once again trapped in the sexually repressed world of traditional Southern society. William A. Gleason explains that Temple still cannot complete the “act of liberation” or “imagine” it, because she is too helpless to exist without some form of male protection (316). Faulkner uses this scene to reveal the hypocrisy of the Old South. Since the truth is not exposed, Temple’s reputation is protected. By returning Temple to the “role of lady” and “back where the paternalists want her,” Faulkner illustrates how the Old South is determined to enforce feminine tradition and uphold the image of the Southern belle (Railey 84).

Overall, the female characters throughout Sanctuary are placed in the patriarchal structure that “tends to convert woman to a sexual object,” and they are “made to suffer
for and be ashamed” of their sexuality (Millett 119). This characterization may suggest that Faulkner holds a misogynistic view toward women, but this is not true because he is “more aware of and sympathetic to the complexity of the female psyche than those who deem him a misogynist or gyneolatrist have allowed” (Wittenberg 234). In fact, he criticizes the Old South for failing to have compassion for Ruby, who tries to improve her life and live honestly. Faulkner challenges social attitudes by characterizing Ruby as the moral compass in Sanctuary and refusing to follow the late-19th century authorial examples of killing off prostitutes and unchaste women. As for Temple, Faulkner depicts her as a “good” girl gone “bad” to illustrate how society fails to acknowledge that every girl has sexual impulses. In essence, the “virgin turns whore and the whore begins to resemble the Madonna” (Roberts 129). With these conflicting, yet ambiguous, characterizations, Faulkner displaces the dichotomies of good/bad and wife/prostitute by disrupting their distinctive boundaries of social classification. He does this to reflect the various identities of the 1930’s American women. As Faulkner questions why the Old South resists the social changes of the 20th century, he exposes that the feminine identities of the Southern belle and the whore are the predominant roles the Old South allows women to perform. In Sanctuary, Faulkner illustrates how Temple and Ruby are continuously punished for rebelling against the traditional role of a woman and are violated into submission. By doing this, he is able to criticize how the Old South forces women to repress their sexual behaviors and conform to the traditional role of wife/mother. Though prostitution is assumed to be a fate worse than death, Faulkner ends the novel illustrating how repression of a woman’s sexuality can rob her of her power. After Temple experiences her sexuality and returns to a submissive role, she
becomes deadened by the realization that she is powerless. In conclusion, Faulkner reveals how the Old Southern society creates a vast chasm between morality and social privilege. Yet, he also points out that if a female exposes her sexuality, regardless of her socioeconomic status, the Old South will deny her a sanctuary.
CHAPTER FOUR

John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden*:

Cathy’s Resistance to Conformity

The “Wild West” refers to California and other parts of the West during the Gold Rush period (1848-1855). Lacking a conventional structure of law and order, this new culture broke free from the “traditional life and Puritanism” of New England and other East Coast states (Vance 194). In 1850, 90% of the population in California consisted of white men, who were between 20 and 40 years old (Frankiel 8). The men left their families behind because they believed it was not “worthwhile to bring a family on a long, tedious, and costly journey when there was no certainty there would be anything but a ghost town when they arrived” (Jeffrey 145). Very few families traveled together. In fact, “only about 5 percent of early California gold rushers were women and children,” and thus the men often did not live in a stable family environment (Jeffrey 132). Since polite women were not around to tame the mining frontier, men were free to enjoy drinking, gambling, and fighting.

Some women may have been particularly attracted to the Wild West because it offered the hope of escaping the restrictive regulations in the East and South. Many of the first single women to arrive were prostitutes, who “planned to better their economic situation” and who “outnumbered respectable women in early mining camps by twenty-five to one” (Jeffrey 148). During the gold rush booms, it was common to see prostitutes “liv[ing] under unusual circumstances at the edge of all-male communities—army garrisons, boom towns, mining and lumber camps” (Rosen, “Go West” 92). In fact,
“gamblers, saloonkeepers, and prostitutes were always among the first in any new boomtown” to provide entertainment for the miners and profit from the prosperous economy (Jeffrey 158-159). Prostitution “was so intimately tied to the social landscape of the California Gold Rush era that the fading out of commercial sex in the region was one of the most important markers of the end of the gold rush era itself” (Laite 743).

Yet, prostitution was only considered a problem in society when the middle class gained prominence and the “emergence of an urban elite” showed an interest in expanding urbanization in the West (Laite 756). “By the time ministers, teachers, and wives arrived, they had to deal with these counterinstitutions [gambling and prostitution]…in order to establish a respectable society” (Jeffrey 158-159). By 1870, enough women had arrived to balance the gender difference with men, which increased the prospect of marriage (Frankiel 8). With the rise of marriage, “other” women were “less necessary and less tolerated. This also precipitated the need to label and repress prostitute women in order to firm up the line between ‘good’ women and ‘bad’ women in mining towns” (Laite 755).

Though Stephen Crane and William Faulkner create female characters that become prostitutes as a result of coercion or economic need, John Steinbeck introduces an alternative motive for prostitution in his 1952 novel East of Eden. Steinbeck creates the character of Cathy Ames, who willingly chooses to enter prostitution, even though she has the opportunity to attend college and get a legitimate job as a teacher. She does not come from a broken home, nor is she desperate for money. Instead, her refusal to conform to conventional social order stems from her desire to achieve independence and live by her own code of conduct. She is motivated to challenge the long-held notion that
females are subordinate to men. She uses her attractiveness to take advantage of unsuspecting men and overpower them.

East of Eden takes place over the 60 years time span from 1860 to 1918. Cathy grows up in the latter part of the 19th century. Though Steinbeck depicts Cathy’s appearance with angelic physical features, he contrasts this image by initially describing Cathy as a monster, and allowing her to exhibit devious behavior throughout her lifespan. As a child, she was suspected of directing neighborhood boys to tie her up as a sexual game, which demonstrates her initial deviant sexual curiosity. In her adolescence, she sets her New England home on fire killing her parents, which illustrates the extreme measures that she takes when she feels threatened. As a career, she refuses a socially acceptable position as a teacher to become a professional prostitute and exploits her customers’ weaknesses through manipulation and blackmail. In particular, she secretly photographs clients, including prominent businessmen and politicians, capturing them in the midst of acting out sadomasochistic fantasies in order to coerce them into complying with her demands. Overall, Cathy does whatever is necessary to establish and then maintain her independence.

Previously, scholars have focused their studies on Cathy as being the epitome of wickedness. For instance, in “The Mirror and the Vamp: Invention, Reflection, and Bad, Bad Cathy Trask in East of Eden,” Louis Owens alleges that Cathy can only be perceived as evil and John H. Timmerman goes to the extreme of describing her as the personification of Satan in John Steinbeck’s Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken. Since Cathy refuses the role of a wife/mother, Sandra Falkenberg argues, in “A Study of Female Characterization Steinbeck’s Fiction” that Cathy lacks a “human impulse” (54).
Lorelei Cederstrom furthers this argument in “Beyond the Boundaries of Sexism: The Archetypal Feminine versus Anima Women in Steinbeck’s Novels” by suggesting that Steinbeck creates Cathy in this manner as a cautionary example for other women to maintain the traditional role of women as a wife/mother. In Steinbeck and Covici: The Story of a Friendship, Thomas Fensch claims, “Steinbeck based the character of Kate on his worst-perceived faults of his first and second wives, Carol and Gwyn” (165). Mimi Reisel Gladstein extends this claim in “The Strong Female Principle of Good—or Evil: The Women of East of Eden,” in which she proposes that Steinbeck creates Cathy in order to blame her for all the bad things that happen in the world and to him. As a result of viewing Cathy in this negative spotlight, scholars like Robert E. Morsberger in “Steinbeck’s Happy Hookers,” insist that Cathy is constructed with a “degree of misogyny” (102).

I disagree that Steinbeck creates Cathy under any misogynistic impulse. Though Steinbeck has Cathy execute devious acts, I agree with Carol L. Hansen’s statement in “Beyond Evil: Cathy and Cal in East of Eden” that Cathy “emerges as a force beyond good and evil, a force of perverse freedom” (223). I extend this claim and believe Cathy’s character supersedes the oversimplified categorization within a “good” or “bad” dichotomy because Steinbeck is actually confronting how the social construction of a “bad” woman is defined. Steinbeck’s narrator writes, “I wonder if it was true” to demonstrate how the narrator questions if his first impression of Cathy, as a monster, is correct (EOE 182). Although I support Fensch’s claim that Steinbeck’s prior marital experiences helped him invent Cathy, I argue that Steinbeck uses his past knowledge more as a therapeutic endeavor to deal with his frustrations, rather than for malice or
revenge. As Sarah Appleton Aguiar points out in “‘No Sanctuary’: Reconsidering the Evil of Cathy Ames Trask,” Steinbeck typically constructs female characters, regardless if they are mothers or prostitutes, to have compassion and sacrifice their own needs for others. Thus, Steinbeck’s conception of Cathy is an anomaly because she is motivated to maintain self-sufficiency and seems to be a cause of misery for the other characters in *East of Eden*. I will argue that Steinbeck does this to illustrate the extreme measures that Cathy, as an early-20th century woman, must take to establish her individual power. She fails to comply with the social demands that would force her to conform her to the role of a traditional woman. Instead, she pretends to do what is expected of her in the presence of an audience, but at other times, she covertly performs backhanded schemes and sexual improprieties. Cathy is not interested in making a political statement or leading a feminist movement, but rather she is determined to maintain her independence.

Though John Gribben claims in “Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*” that Steinbeck denies Cathy the opportunity to make choices and is compelled by her innate instincts, I disagree. Steinbeck creates obstacles for Cathy to illustrate that she contemplates her actions before she responds. Her decisions are made based on asserting her free will and establishing her independence. As a young girl, Cathy is instructed on how to behave and is denied any power to freely express herself. Since she has learned that some behaviors are unacceptable in polite society, Cathy indulges her curiosities in clandestine adventures. In particular, she becomes interested in understanding what is socially considered risqué and finds pleasure in experimenting with taboo acts, which usually involve some form of socially deviant sex. Her fascination leads her to have an insatiable desire for power and control. Eventually, she embraces the belief that she is
better than everyone, and she enacts vengeance upon anyone who gets in her way through manipulation, seduction, and murder.

Steinbeck describes these occurrences in more provocative terms than Crane does in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. Steinbeck was able to publish an explicit description of prostitution because the 1950s, when compared to the late-19th century Victorian Era, was a “generally freer atmosphere which permit[ted] open talk about sex” (Smigel and Seiden 14). In fact, there was a decline in the double standard, as more women remained single and were successful in legitimate careers. Although more women were having sex outside of marriage, this did not impede the business of brothels. Steinbeck writes:

> The whorehouse was an accepted if not openly discussed institution. It was said that its existence protected decent women. An unmarried man could go to one of these houses and evacuate the sexual energy which was making him uneasy and at the same time maintain the popular attitudes about the purity and loveliness of women. It was a mystery, but then there are many mysterious things in our social thinking. (Steinbeck, *EOE* 90)

This passage illustrates Steinbeck’s critique of the social hypocrisy toward brothels, as he points out that it was acceptable for men to “evacuate” their sexual urges, while decent women were still discouraged from expressing their own sexuality. By keeping respectable women sexually repressed, men are better able to dominate and control them. In contrast, the prostitute is encouraged by men to be uninhibited and fulfill their desires. Steinbeck incorporates this passage in *East of Eden* as part of a satirical commentary on how the patriarchal figures of politicians and ministers publically condemn prostitution, defining it as illegal and immoral, but then secretly engage in those same acts.
Steinbeck uses prostitution as a means of addressing the shifting identity of womanhood from the strictly religious towns of New England to the blossoming civilization of California. As an adult, Cathy realizes she can gain financial independence through prostitution. I argue that Cathy’s actions are not a demonstration of evil, but an extreme measure to obtain independence. In order to illustrate that Cathy struggles for her freedom, I will do a close reading of her deviant acts to show that she is motivated to protect herself. When Cathy shoots her husband, Adam, I argue that she does this to escape from the confines of marriage. She could have easily killed him, but she leaves him alive to demonstrate that she is not the subordinate woman he perceives her to be. Steinbeck suggests that a woman who asserts an aggressive form of power is such an unacceptable concept to society that she may seem like a monster. Yet, Steinbeck also implies that Cathy’s extreme behavior is caused from her desperation to achieve freedom and a way to vent her frustrations. Though Steinbeck does not condone or condemn Cathy’s behavior, she eventually commits suicide when she senses that her prior offenses will be exposed. Just as Crane allows Maggie to assert her individual power by making the choice to commit suicide, Steinbeck also offers Cathy the same liberating escape. Yet, Steinbeck allows Cathy to die with dignity before losing her power and experiencing public dishonor.

Steinbeck creates a sequence of events to illustrate how Cathy progresses toward a deviant lifestyle as she matures. By analyzing these events, I will reveal how Steinbeck constructs Cathy to resist authoritative control, demonstrating that Cathy does whatever is necessary to maintain her freedom, regardless if her actions are harmful to others. When Steinbeck first introduces Cathy Ames, he writes that “she was not like other people,
never was from birth” (Steinbeck, EOE 72). The narrator distinctively separates her from
traditional women and comments that she “was what I called a monster” (Steinbeck, EOE
131). Though the term “monster” brings to mind a hideous creature, Steinbeck contrasts
this image by describing Cathy:

As though nature concealed a trap, Cathy had from the first a face of
innocence. Her hair was gold and lovely; wide-set hazel eyes with upper
lids that drooped made her look mysteriously sleepy. Her nose was
delicate and thin, and her cheekbones high and wide, sweeping down to a
small chin so that her face was heart-shaped. Her mouth was well shaped
and well lipped but abnormally small—what used to be called a rosebud.
(Steinbeck, EOE 72)

In this passage, Cathy is depicted as an ideally beautiful child. Her features are delicately
constructed to a doll-like perfection. Steinbeck’s use of the phrase “nature concealed a
trap” indicates that her looks are deceiving because she is not as innocent as she looks.
Steinbeck creates this portrait to disrupt the perception of “good” and “bad” binaries. By
associating her with the term “monster,” he conditions the reader to expect the worst
possible behavior from her, but at the same time, induces an unsettling feeling because
she is described as being physically flawless. With the repetition of the word “monster,”
Steinbeck “established his dominion over the imaginative properties of that word and
proclaimed his intention to re-define the meaning of monster for his own symbolic
purposes” (Demott 80). Cathy “is at once a complex and a simple character. It is the
custom nowadays in writing to tell nothing about a character but to let him emerge
gradually through the story and the dialogue” (Steinbeck, “Journal” 43). By doing this,
he is able to provoke the reader to contemplate their own judgment of Cathy based on the evidence he does provide.

Though “she never conformed in dress or conduct,” her community suspects that she is different in other ways, which causes them “to inspect her, to be close to her, to try to find what caused the disturbance she distributed so subtly” (Steinbeck, EOE 73). Steinbeck describes this subtle difference in a foreboding sense that Cathy lacks something, but he does not classify a specific deficiency. In “Cathy in East of Eden: Indispensable to the Thematic Design,” Kyoko Ariki suggests that what Cathy lacks is the “ability to love” and that she “must feel vaguely scared of the people who have what she does not” (Ariki 236). I do not find any textual evidence to confirm the claim that Cathy is scared of not being able to love. Instead, Cathy is bored with a routine life and searches for some sort of excitement. She is attracted toward an unconventional sense of amusement. She resorts to “hazardous, self-damaging, outlandish, antisocial, and even self-destructive exploits in order to find something fresh and stimulating” (Cleckley 402).

Steinbeck describes suspiciously devious aspects of her personality, which include a sexually mature curiosity. Steinbeck “insists upon an honest and candid approach to sex in order to avoid a false and unhealthy attitude toward it,” and has Cathy learn about sex before she reaches adolescence (Govoni 21). Since sex was considered a taboo topic of discussion, her parents never broached the topic, but somehow:

Cathy learned when she was very young that sexuality with all its attendant yearnings and pains, jealousies and taboos, is the most disturbing impulse humans have. And in that day it was even more disturbing than it is now, because the subject was unmentionable and unmentioned.
Everyone concealed that little hell in himself, while publicly pretending it did not exist—and when he was caught up in it he was completely helpless. Cathy learned that by the manipulation and use of this one part of people she could gain and keep power over nearly anyone. It was at once a weapon and a threat. It was irresistible. And since the blind helplessness seems never to have fallen on Cathy, it is probable that she had very little of the impulse herself and indeed felt a contempt for those who did. (Steinbeck, EOE 74)

Though early exposure to sexual abuse is a plausible explanation as to how Cathy acquires this knowledge, Steinbeck does not provide any evidence to suggest that she is a victim of abuse. Instead, he insinuates that she has an innate perception of others’ weaknesses, and that she exploits them for sport. Steinbeck also points out that “she had very little of the impulse herself” for sex. This suggests that Cathy may be sexually undeveloped, or incapable of feeling sexual desire, because she considers it a weakness and refuses to possess a vulnerability of her own. Subsequently, she is amused by the power of “manipulation” that she has over people and finds the control “irresistible.”

Steinbeck provides a glimpse of Cathy’s peculiar behavior with the barn incident. The scene opens with Mrs. Ames believing she sees Cathy walk toward the family barn, so she goes looking for her. When Mrs. Ames finds Cathy in the barn, “she froze, mouth open, at what she saw. Cathy lay on the floor, her skirts pulled up. She was naked to the waist, and beside her two boys about fourteen were kneeling. The shock of the sudden light froze them too” (Steinbeck, EOE 75). Steinbeck could have easily created this scene as a harmless act of inquisitiveness, but he introduces the presence of a
questionable depravity, as “Cathy’s wrists were tied with a heavy rope” (Steinbeck, EOE 76). Since Cathy is capable of “coldly, foreseeing difficulties and preparing for them,” the narrator suggests that the use of the rope is a part of her methodical preparation (Steinbeck, EOE 74). If she were caught in the act, her tied hands would suggest that the boys were the aggressors.

Since Steinbeck does not provide a description of the events leading up to this scene, the details are unknown. He does provide limited information from the boys’ confession. Steinbeck writes, “Cathy, they said, had started the whole thing, and they had each given her five cents. They had not tied her hands. They said they remembered that she was playing with a rope” (EOE 76). This testimony is unreliable because it is possible that the boys are lying about Cathy’s involvement and solicitation to escape further punishment. Regardless of their motivation, their statement implicates Cathy as the instigator and suggests that she is capable of such actions. Also, the mention that money is exchanged foreshadows Cathy’s progression into prostitution. Though Cathy never confirms or denies the allegations, her physical reaction is revealing as “her breathing stopped and her body grew rigid and her cheeks reddened from holding her breath” (Steinbeck, EOE 76). She tries to control her physical movements in order to prevent herself from expressing a genuine reaction, or divulging any incriminating information. Cathy’s rigid posture may also suggest to outside observers that she is frigid and too immature to knowingly consent to sex. Steinbeck insinuates that regardless of Cathy’s age, her attraction to independence and power over others is more important than respecting social mores, and she covertly tests the boundaries of what she can and cannot accomplish.
Though Cathy does not cause any visible trouble to her parents during her childhood, when she turns sixteen, she tries to openly assert her free will. One morning she is reading *Alice in Wonderland*, and Mrs. Ames disapproves because she thinks that it is a book for children and that Cathy is too old for it. However, Cathy sees it as a significant book and explains, “‘I can get to be *so* little you can’t even see me’” (Steinbeck, EOE 81). By being “*so* little,” no one would be able to find her; she could escape any social restrictions. Soon after, she announces to her mother that she is no longer going to attend school. Initially Mrs. Ames takes the statement in jest because Cathy “‘never missed a day’” of school in her life, but she soon realizes that Cathy is serious (Steinbeck, EOE 81). As a result, “Mrs. Ames was afraid of her daughter,” because “she was losing control, that the bridle put in her hands for the governing of Cathy was slipping through her fingers” (Steinbeck, EOE 81). In actuality, Mrs. Ames is more afraid of losing control in general. Though she conforms to the patriarchal idea that men are the authority figure, she manipulates Mr. Ames into doing what she wants, including disciplining and punishing Cathy. Mrs. Ames tries to reinforce her illusion of control by insisting that Mr. Ames gives Cathy a lecture. The father “spoke of authority God had given him over his child and of how this natural authority had been armed by the state” (Steinbeck, EOE 82). As a patriarchal figure, Mr. Ames voices the false belief that a male has supreme power in society, especially when it concerns his family. This idea is further illustrated as Mr. Ames tries to assert a paternal power over Cathy for rebelling by claiming that God righteously ordains his male authority, which is also reinforced by state law. As a result, Cathy is expected to follow his orders, and as a result, maintain the patriarchal structure and social order. Mr. Ames is an impotent
authority figure, relying on God and state laws in an attempt to convince Cathy that he is powerful. Yet, Steinbeck critiques the patriarchy for supporting this belief, which causes Cathy to resort to violence to obtain freedom.

Cathy does not take kindly to his threats, and in the morning she runs away from home to Boston. Mr. Ames goes on a mission to retrieve Cathy, and when they return home Mrs. Ames “forced him to whip Cathy” (Steinbeck, EOE 83). While Cathy is receiving corporal punishment, she displays a limited range of emotions, and she tries to determine which emotion she should have from her father’s reaction. “Once she had learned she screamed, she writhed, she cried, she begged, and she had the satisfaction of feeling the blows instantly become lighter” (Steinbeck, EOE 83). She fakes tears to convince her father that she is remorseful. He fails to notice how she exhibits signs of anger, as “her neck were tight and there were lumps just under her temples where the jaw muscle knotted,” but she is able to maintain self-control and contain her anger (Steinbeck, EOE 83).

Mrs. Ames exhibits similar anger, but she lacks self-control and freely expresses it. Even though Cathy’s doctor tells her there is “no evidence that she had been mistreated” or raped after the barn incident, she is enraged (Steinbeck, EOE 76). “Out of her hysteria a sadistic devil peered. She wanted blood. There was a kind of pleasure in her demands for punishment” (Steinbeck, EOE 76). Though Mrs. Ames’s volatile behavior seems to adhere to a natural parental response to protect her daughter, a closer inspection of her reaction reveals that she has malicious intentions. Steinbeck goes to the extreme of describing her as a “sadistic devil,” who enjoys the idea of a brutal revenge. She demonstrates an inclination toward sadistic pleasure after Cathy’s teacher, James
Grew, commits suicide. During a family dinner, she is engrossed with discussing the “matter of the body and the gun in detail” (Steinbeck, *EOE* 80). It seems odd that Mrs. Ames is intent on dwelling on the gruesome details of James’s death, but it is more disturbing that she does this during dinner, which would often repel listeners from continuing to eat.

It is not until Cathy defies her demands that she unleashes her wrath onto her daughter. Mrs. Ames does not deliver punishment with her own hands because she follows the social expectation that the father is the disciplinarian. Mrs. Ames enacts her power only as far as she can convince her husband to agree with her and authorize her request. Even though Mr. Ames is reluctant to punish Cathy, Mrs. Ames uses her powers of persuasion to get Mr. Ames to deliver punishment. Steinbeck insinuates that Mrs. Ames’s limited power causes her frustration, which eventually builds up and explodes into a wrathful vengeance when she feels threatened. Steinbeck also suggests that Mrs. Ames’s repression is unhealthy and fails to teach Cathy how to deal with her emotions or stress.

Cathy shares her mother’s compulsion to manipulate others, and the reader may infer that she learns this behavior from her mother. As a result of her mother’s erratic behavior, Cathy is predisposed to mimic these tendencies. At the same time, Steinbeck suggests that Cathy has an aversion to such uncontrollable outbursts because she views them as a weakness and refuses to be vulnerable. Though Cathy is more skillful at concealing her emotions than her mother, Cathy is still only temporarily able to contain herself. Eventually, Cathy acts out her frustrations in acts of violence, but she makes sure not to have any witnesses. Though Cathy is angry, she patiently and methodically “began
to make plans for the future” to escape from her family without them finding her, while projecting the image of a dutiful daughter (Steinbeck, EOE 83). Steinbeck depicts her premeditated action in precise detail:

Cathy worked quickly but without hurry. She put on an old apron to cover her clothes. In the basement she found a jelly jar with a top and carried it out to the carriage house, where the tools were kept. In the chickenyard she caught a little pullet, took it to the block and chopped its head off, and held the writhing neck over the jelly jar until it was half full of blood. Then she carried the quivering pullet to the manure pile and buried it deep. Back in the kitchen she took off the apron and put it in the stove and poked the coals until a flame sprang up on the cloth. She washed her hands and inspected her shoes and stockings and wiped a dark spot from the toe of her right shoe. She looked at her face in the mirror. Her cheeks were bright with color and her eyes shone and her mouth turned up in its small childlike smile. On her way out she hid the jelly jar under the lowest part of the kitchen steps. Her mother had not been gone even ten minutes. (Steinbeck, EOE 85)

This scene, like the barn incident, indicates how “she planned everything coldly, foreseeing difficulties and preparing for them,” which indicates her control and confirms her free will (Steinbeck, EOE 74). She does not spontaneously react to her punishment. Instead, she patiently waits for the most opportune moment to execute her escape plan. Steinbeck’s narrator explicitly illustrates her precise plan, as she intentionally destroys evidence, as she “buried it deep” and “put it in the stove.” After she completes these
actions, “her mouth turned up in its small childlike smile” (Steinbeck, EOE 85). The smile is an indication that Cathy is satisfied with the execution of her plan, but the description of her as “childlike” is a reminder of Cathy’s youthful, yet deceptive, appearance. She patiently waits until the night when her sleeping parents are most vulnerable and least suspecting of danger. Steinbeck’s narrator uses vague insinuations that “the fire broke out at about three o’clock in the morning” and does not describe Cathy starting the fire, but the reader may infer that she is the culprit (Steinbeck, EOE 85). By performing the crime to look like an accident, Cathy is able to conceal any foul play. She also distances herself from the crime by not witnessing her parents’ actual moment of death, nor actually spilling their blood on her hands. Steinbeck suggests that Cathy is intent on obtaining independence, and by killing her parents she can ensure that she will not be forced to return home again.

Though most critics claim that Cathy is the epitome of evil, Jackson J. Benson suggests that Steinbeck did a “great deal of research in both theoretical and clinical psychology” (Benson 173), and had “also been reading abnormal psychology,” which is apparent in his characterization of Cathy (Benson 207). Steinbeck explains her behavior and divergence from standard morality with psychology, as Cathy is “born without kindness or the potential of conscience” (Steinbeck, EOE 71). Though “defying the rules is part of many adolescents’ experimentation with autonomy and the development of an adult-like identity,” it is abnormal for a teenager to go to the extreme of defying the rules by murdering their parents (Seagrave and Grisso 229). Some parricide offenders, those who kill their parents, “perceive or believe that they have been mistreated, when in fact there was no evidence of abuse. These individuals are those who view their parents’
restrictions and rules as a form of abuse, and retaliate by killing the source of these punishments or abuse” (Amorado, Chia-Ying, and Hua-Fu 7). Cathy follows this design, because she is intent on establishing her individual identity, which is a “personal schematization of life” where she can determine her “own behavior norms” (William 86). Her desire for freedom outweighs any regard for human life. She lives by her own rules and rejects the socially dominant definition of morality. This behavior is more simply known as psychopathy. A psychopath has an anti-social personality disorder, which is exhibited through “callous/unemotional traits, characterized by lack of guilt or empathy, superficial charm, and sensation seeking” (Harris, Skilling, and Rice 207). Yet, a psychopath has the ability to disguise these traits to seem outwardly normal. Like most psychopaths, Cathy is “not mentally ill,” but she is “‘morally challenged’” (Kirwin 3). Steinbeck suggests that Cathy knows what she is doing is wrong by society’s standards, but she does it anyway because she does not care—she makes a conscious choice to attack anyone who gets in her way. Though not everyone who rebels against patriarchy is a psychopath, Steinbeck constructs Cathy with these psychopathic tendencies to illustrate how strong her determination is to obtain independence. This characterization is similar to Crane’s depiction of Nell, who also manipulates people for personal gain. Yet, Steinbeck does a more in-depth portrayal of Cathy so the reader is provided with more information to understand her motives.

After the fire, she flees from her hometown to Boston and resorts to further rebellion. She decides to start her independent life by using her sexual knowledge for profit and asserting a dominant position of power. “This is one area where women can reign supreme, one function that men cannot usurp, one attribute that may not be taken
away. In a world where men dominate, looming from the high places and lurking in the low, her sex is all that a woman can truly call her own” (Miles 106). Therefore Cathy follows her “individualized definition of sexual relations outside of marriage” by entering prostitution (Thomas 88). Steinbeck’s Cathy stands in strict contrast to Crane’s Maggie, who comes from an impoverished neighborhood and becomes a prostitute out of desperation to earn money. Instead, Steinbeck has Cathy reside in a middle class community because “very few prostitutes come from homes where all the conditions are good,—good family life, opportunity for education, economic security” (Thomas 116). Unlike Maggie, Cathy has other options for work like teaching. Yet, Cathy chooses to become a prostitute to have the freedom to be her own boss and make her own rules.

Maggie does not experience this same sense of independence because she is too emotionally fragile. Since Maggie is unable to adapt, she is unsuccessful with prostitution and faces destitution. As noted earlier, Cathy is more comparable to Crane’s characterization of Nell, as they have both mastered the skills to successfully hustle men and maintain a lucrative career. They excel at their profession because they avoid letting their emotions interfere with their business. Yet, they begin to enjoy the pain and suffering they cause others.

In order to establish her new life, Cathy alters her name to Cathy Amesbury, and this “shift in name signifies an ever-shifting characterization—and a split personality” (C. Hansen 225). With a new identity, she sheds the image of an innocent child and constructs a new personality as a seductive woman. Cathy pursues her new career and finds Mr. Edwards, who is as “coldblooded a whoremaster as ever lived” (Steinbeck, EOE 92). Though Cathy “was far too pretty for his business,” he still “wanted this one
for his own” (Steinbeck, EOE 91). Eventually, he falls “hopelessly, miserably in love with Catherine Amesbury. He rented a sweet little brick house for her and then gave it to her. He bought her every imaginable luxury” (Steinbeck, EOE 92). Regardless of these lavish gifts, Cathy begins to stow away money for safe keeping until she has enough to establish complete independence. Eventually, Mr. Edwards finds her secret stash of money and realizes that she has been exploiting his generosity. He becomes furious and brings her to Connecticut to punish her. “He meant to whip her and put her in one of the rooms at the inn, whip her and move her to another town, and so on until she was of no use anymore,” but his anger becomes uncontrollable (Steinbeck, EOE 97). At first he uses a whip, then his fists, and finishes with a stone. After “he listened for her heart-beat and could hear nothing over the thumping of his own” heartbeat, he believes she is dead and abandons her (Steinbeck, EOE 97). Steinbeck includes this vicious scene to illustrate that Cathy is not as invincible as she may seem.

Somehow Cathy survives this attack and her desire “to live forced her to drag herself along the dark road, looking for help” (Steinbeck, EOE 98). Since Steinbeck makes it apparent that Cathy is vulnerable and unable to defend herself, it is imperative for her to find a protector in order to survive. In “Chapter 11,” she is described crawling to the Trask brothers’ door like “a dirty bundle of rags and mud [that] was trying to worm its way up the steps” (Steinbeck, EOE 109). She also is covered in blood with “a caked face with cracked lips” and “swollen, blackened lids” (Steinbeck, EOE 109). At the first sight of her, Charles Trask, a harsh realist, believes that she is trouble and that they should not help her, but Adam, an extreme idealist, is compassionate and assumes the role of her protector. Adam tries to nurse Cathy back to health and tends to her severe
injuries, which include many broken bones, missing teeth, and a head wound that is “open to the skull” (Steinbeck, EOE 111). Since Adam shows kindness toward her, she knows “she could control him” (Steinbeck, EOE 120). So in her moments of consciousness, she gets Adam to promise that he will keep her safe. Unbeknownst to Adam, Cathy “had not only made up her mind to marry him,” but “she had so decided before he had asked her” (Steinbeck, EOE 119-120). Steinbeck constructs this scene not only to allow Cathy time to recover, but also to show that her delicate body is not as indomitable as the monster she is previously described to be.

Steinbeck writes that “she did not want to be married,” but “for the time being it was a refuge” (EOE 120). It seems out of character for Cathy to consent to marriage, because in this sacred union a woman is expected to assume a subordinate position, but marriage is directly related to prostitution. Simone de Beauvoir cites A. Marro in The Second Sex by affirming that the “only difference between women who sell themselves in prostitution and those who sell themselves in marriage is in the price and length of time the contract runs. For both the sexual act is a service: the one is hired for life by one man; the other has several clients who pay her by the piece” (619). Steinbeck illustrates that Cathy defines her own terms of the marriage as she does with prostitution by refusing to consummate their marriage on their wedding night. Instead, she drugs Adam and betrays him by having sex with Charles. Adam remains oblivious to this incident and begins to plan a new life for them.

When Adam wants to move to California, Cathy reveals that she does not want to go. Regardless, Adam ignores her protest, because he is delusional and “has a picture of his life and he will continue to maintain his picture against every influence until his world
comes down” (Steinbeck, “Journal” 76). Since she is still recovering, she does not put up much of a fight, and they eventually move to Salinas Valley, California. Cathy continues with this scheme until she can find another option, but she soon finds herself with more trouble. Throughout her previous sexual encounters, she is able to prevent pregnancy, but in her vulnerable state she conceives twins. She does not know the paternity of the twins because the father could be either Trask brother, or each could have fathered one of the twins. When she discovers she is pregnant, she tries to abort the babies with a “knitting needle” (Steinbeck, EOE 133). When the attempt fails, she is forced to endure the pregnancy. She patiently “relaxed and waited for the change she knew must come some time” because “she had the inhuman attribute of abandoning what she could not get and of waiting for what she could get” (Steinbeck, EOE 157). Cathy’s behavior is reminiscent of how she patiently plans the parricide. Steinbeck includes this scene to illustrate that nothing will get in Cathy’s way of achieving freedom, including having children.

Steinbeck characterizes Adam as an ineffective patriarchal figure. Adam is unable to ascertain a masculine form of dominance because he is too preoccupied with creating an ideal life and ignores the reality that exists before him. For instance, he deludes himself into believing that Cathy is the perfect wife and expects her to assume a subordinate role. When he looks at her, he is reminded “of the angels on Sunday School cards” (Steinbeck, EOE 157). As Adam embraces this image of her as angelic, he fails to see her real persona and her desire for independence. When Cathy is well enough to travel after giving birth to her twin sons, Adam is overwhelmed with shock when she prepares to depart. Upon opening her bedroom door, he finds Cathy “as though she had
been standing waiting. She was dressed in her neat traveling dress” (Steinbeck, _EOE_ 199). Adam demands, “‘You can’t go—not from me,’” and he “took the key from inside of the door, slammed the door shut, and locked it” (Steinbeck, _EOE_ 199). Since Adam tries to prevent Cathy from leaving, she shoots him in his shoulder with a .44 Colt. Through this act, Cathy emasculates Adam by using the pistol, which is a phallic symbol, to exert her power while making him compliant. As she retreats, she says, “‘I didn’t know you would take it so. I’m sorry, Adam’” (Steinbeck, _EOE_ 200). Steinbeck includes this apology to illustrate that Cathy is capable of compassion. Since Adam treats her kindly during her most vulnerable state of health, Cathy shows her gratitude by sparing his life. She wounds him only enough to convince him that she is serious about leaving.

Though Cathy’s behavior is socially unacceptable, Steinbeck reserves judgment on her extreme, and sometime deadly, activities. Steinbeck focuses on describing how the events unfold, rather than classifying them as moral or immoral. Steinbeck relays a majority of the text through a third person perspective, but he sporadically interjects the story with comments from a first person narrator to offer the reader a different assessment of Cathy. For example, the narrator specifically addresses how Cathy deviates from her prior negative characterization by allowing Adam to live. The narrator explains, “When I said Cathy was a monster it seemed to me that it was so. Now I have bent close with a glass over the small print of her and reread the footnotes, and I wonder if it was true” (Steinbeck, _EOE_ 182). This conflicting perception is understandable because Cathy is such a complex character, but with this quote, the narrator raises doubt that Cathy is really a monster. Even though shooting Adam could be perceived to be a heinous act,
Steinbeck shows how Cathy is really just fighting for her freedom as she tends to lash out “only when she is feeling cornered or trapped,” and hurts anyone who gets in her way (Aguiar 148). Steinbeck suggests that Cathy will do whatever it takes to pursue “a life of pleasure or personal achievement,” which includes abandoning her husband and babies for the restrictive role of wife/mother limits her freedom (Lundberg and Farnham 289).

In order to establish a new life in the neighboring King City, Cathy distorts her identity by changing her name to Kate Albey. Under this guise she exhibits sadistic tendencies as an enterprising prostitute. She chooses to work in a high-end brothel, which services socially prominent men, including a senator, councilman, professor, and minister (Steinbeck, EOE 320). Her goal is to exploit their weaknesses and get satisfaction from overpowering such strong patriarchal figures. Unlike Adam’s desire to recreate Eden, Kate is focused on constructing an anti-Eden, which contains licentiousness and debauchery. In fact, Kate proudly describes the results of her sadomasochistic treatment of her regular customers: “‘Take down the pants of one of my regulars. Look at the heelmarks on the groin—very pretty. And the little cuts that bleed for a long time. Oh, Mother dear, I’ve got the sweetest set of razors all in a case—and so sharp, so sharp” (Steinbeck, EOE 234). Steinbeck provides these specific details to reveal the extent of Cathy’s deviancy. He illustrates that Cathy can only have authority within the confines of the brothel, for outside this realm she remains powerless. So when the patriarchal figures come knocking on her door, she experiences a perverse pleasure by making them grovel, literally, at her feet. Steinbeck also suggests that her socially respected clients are equally deviant for paying her to perform such acts.
Steinbeck challenges the social hypocrisy of denying female sexuality by allowing Kate to overpower the male pillars of society. In order to establish more power, Kate befriends Faye, the madam of the brothel, to improve the business and strategize to take it over. Steinbeck characterizes Faye as a “motherly type,” who is compelled to take care of people, breaking the stereotype that prostitutes and madams are callous (Steinbeck, EOE 218). Since Faye is easy to manipulate, Kate assumes the role of being “young and pretty, so lady-like, so well educated” in order to exploit Faye’s affection for her and gain the upper hand (Steinbeck, EOE 219). Eventually, Faye considers Kate her daughter and legally wills the business to her. At first, Kate is comfortable with managing the business, but when Faye persistently tries to persuade Kate to stop privately seeing customers, Kate feels that her freedom is restricted. If she were prohibited from having appointments with clients, she would no longer be able to gain the pleasure of making powerful men crumble under her control. In response, she is motivated by self-preservation to find a way to keep her job. As she did with her previous schemes, she patiently plans. “She built a structure and attacked it, and if it showed the slightest shakiness she tore it down and started fresh” (Steinbeck, EOE 238). One night, Kate has an intimate dinner with Faye and poisons her. As a result, Kate begins her reign in the brothel. In this scene, Steinbeck illustrates her determination to maintain her independence at all costs.

Kate’s power is unquestioned until Adam discovers her at the brothel and confronts her. After his presence is announced, Kate responds by taking “out a revolver with a short barrel” from her desk and hiding it under a piece of paper on top of her desk (Steinbeck, EOE 316). Once Adam expresses a sense of relief at seeing her again, she
realizes that he does not pose a threat and removes her hand from the concealed gun.

After Adam does a visual inspection of Kate, he claims, “Now I see you” and “Now I can forget it” (Steinbeck, EOE 317). Steinbeck suggests that Adam is coming to terms with how he projected a false image onto Kate and is pleased that he finally sees her true nature as an evil woman. Yet, Adam’s perception is limited because “he has merely withdrawn one projection, his view of Cathy as angel, only to replace it with another, his neighbor’s view of her as a devil” (Cederstrom 202). She becomes self-conscious when she notices that Adam is “looking at her fattened ankles” and “her protruding stomach” (Steinbeck, EOE 317). Since she no longer illuminates the same youthful beauty as the last time Adam saw her, he sees these signs of aging as a physical manifestation of her deviant acts and a loss of her previously powerful sexual appeal. Yet, when Kate notices his reaction, she still tries to seduce him by “using what she perceives to be her only weapon—her sexuality—to defend herself, often viciously, from what she perceives to be a domineering and threatening masculine world” (Owens, “Steinbeck’s East of Eden” 83). As Adam seems to gain self-esteem, he fails to fall for her manipulation again. In response, she becomes furious: “uncontrolled hatred shone in Kate’s eyes. She screamed, a long and shrill animal screech” (Steinbeck, EOE 323). Though Adam seems as though he can handle the truth, he reacts in fear and “moved slowly toward the door, balancing his steps carefully. His hand fumbled at the doorjamb” (Steinbeck 323). This is another scene where Steinbeck shows that Kate is not invincible, and her alluring influence is useless because Adam’s will proves to be stronger than her persuasive techniques. Steinbeck suggests that with the deterioration of her physical appearance her power also begins to diminish. Since she fails to affect people as she did in her youth by getting them
to do what she wants, she becomes an ineffective figure of authority. As a result, her independence is threatened because she fears that she may become too weak to defend herself and be forced into a position of powerlessness.

Steinbeck continues to illustrate the decline of Kate’s tyranny. As her health worsens with debilitating arthritic pain, she needs to rely more on her employees, who eventually try to blackmail her by accusing her for being responsible for Faye’s death. Kate tries not to be rattled by these challenges, but she worries that her enemies are closing in on her and threatening her safety. As a result, she withdraws to a cave-like room “to hide in, a dark burrow in the earth, a place where no eyes could stare at her” (Steinbeck, EOE 470). The description of hiding in “a dark burrow” is reminiscent of a small animal hiding to evade danger. Steinbeck suggests that Kate mimics this behavior to protect herself from peril. Her ultimate unraveling happens when her twin sons, Caleb and Aron, visit her. Caleb, the “dark” son, exhibits similar personality traits like Cathy, but Aron, “the blond and beautiful boy,” is an idealist like Adam (Steinbeck, EOE 545). When Caleb gets angry, he seeks revenge to hurt Aron by bringing him to meet Kate. After this encounter, Kate is haunted with thoughts of Cal “smiling with cruelty” (Steinbeck, EOE 550), as Aron is “hurt, bewildered, despairing” (Steinbeck, EOE 548) and “his eyes mad with shock” (Steinbeck 545). By looking in her sons’ eyes she recognizes that “they had something she lacked, and she didn’t know what it was” (Steinbeck, EOE 550). Even though she is unable to understand what it is that she lacks, she is overwhelmed with emotion at identifying its existence in her sons. Steinbeck allows Kate to cry with “streaming eyes” for the first time (Steinbeck, EOE 550). This genuine expression of emotion may be an indication that she has a conscience, or just
simply that she is finally capable of feeling something besides her fierce need to protect her independence.

When Kate sees Aron, she is also reminded of when “she was a very small girl with a face as lovely and fresh as her son’s face” (Steinbeck, *EOE* 548). This causes her to reminisce about her own childhood, in which “she was different” from other people and lacked a place to belong (Steinbeck, *EOE* 549). Unable to find companionship, she remembers finding solace by reading *Alice in Wonderland*. She imagines that Alice is her friend because she believes that they share the same difficulties growing up. Sarah Appleton Aguiar suggests in “‘No Sanctuary’: Reconsidering the Evil of Cathy Ames Trask” that Cathy “resort[s] to extreme measures to survive. And, like Alice, who may employ less than moral standards to negotiate her way through Wonderland, Cathy too justifies her behavior as necessary” (151). Both characters are self-sufficient outcasts, who are unafraid to voice their opinions and refuse to conform to social expectations. Kate envisions that she is like Alice where “no door could close her out and no door could close her in” and she would be able to escape (Steinbeck, *EOE* 549). In essence, Kate wants to be free. Instead, she experiences a failed fantasy because she has not achieved serenity, has never had a friend, and has lost her beauty.

In fact, Kate transforms into “a sick ghost, crooked and in some way horrible” (Steinbeck, *EOE* 550). These physical features display the disfiguring results of her rebellious behavior. When this negative transformation progresses, Kate finds sanctuary in thoughts of death. She takes methodical steps to complete her final plan. She orders the brothel staff not to disturb her for the rest of the night, freshens up her make-up, brushes her hair, and manicures her nails. She retrieves a capsule containing “six grains
of morphine, a good, sure margin” from a tube hanging on her necklace (Steinbeck, EOE 462). As she puts the pill in her mouth she says, “‘Eat me’ and ‘‘Drink me’’” when she swallows it with tea. (Steinbeck, EOE 551). For her final moment, Steinbeck writes, “Her heart beat solemnly and her breathing slowed as she grew smaller and smaller and then disappeared—she had never been” (Steinbeck, EOE 551). Steinbeck’s use of the iconic elements of “Eat Me” pills and “Drink Me” potions allow Kate to exhibit the ultimate enactment of power and control by ending her life with her own hands. In regards to this scene, Steinbeck comments in his journal and writes, “I guess there will be a howl that I am being sympathetic to her. I’m not, really. Just putting it down as it might have happened. There aren’t any should have beens. This is the way Cathy died” (Steinbeck, “Journal” 169). This ending makes sense, since historically it was common for prostitutes to seek “relief from life with morphine, the inevitable end of their unfortunate kind,” especially when they became too old or had a visible disease that would discourage customers (West 26). As a result, they lacked the financial means to survive. In contrast, Kate commits suicide when she is financially secure. The text implies that Kate is motivated to preserve her position of power when her employees become insubordinate and she approaches the reality of getting old and dying.

Throughout the novel, Steinbeck traces the chaos of Cathy’s psyche as a little girl through adulthood to illustrate the difficulties she faces as she negotiates through this maturation process. Steinbeck does not condone or condemn her actions, but he subjectively explains her actions and illustrates how she negatively affects others, causing others emotional trauma and even death. Though Cathy achieves power and financial security, she is ultimately unsuccessful in her endeavor because she cannot permanently
protect herself, as she feels a relentless threat of being harmed. Therefore, she continuously calculates a multitude of possible escapes before she can be trapped. Though Steinbeck initially describes her as a monster, he has the narrator comment, “It doesn’t matter that Cathy was what I have called a monster. Perhaps we can’t understand Cathy, but on the other hand we are capable of many things in all directions, of great virtues and great sins” (Steinbeck, EOE 131-132). In this statement, Steinbeck suggests that one person is not completely evil or good because each person is constructed with both tendencies. Cathy happens to choose to act out violently, but in the end Steinbeck shows that she is capable of goodness. By designating Aron as her beneficiary, she exhibits a “slight glimmer of maternal protection” and this act provides a glimpse of what might have been—connections she might have made, and affection she might have shared with her sons” (Heavilin 94). In the end, Steinbeck suggests that her suicide is her last attempt to enact her power, for she avoids the possibility that someone could eventually take advantage of her as her health declines. Steinbeck illustrates the extreme measures that Cathy must take in order to maintain her independence and defend her reign of power. Since Cathy lived as she wanted to, it is only logical that she die on her own terms.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed how four different American authors characterize fallen women and prostitutes in their novels between 1872 and 1952 to reflect the social mores of late-19th century and mid-20th century America. Alcott, Crane, and Faulkner created fallen women and prostitute characters to bring awareness to the public about the conditions and discrimination that these women experienced. In contrast, Steinbeck creates a prostitute character to break this stereotype of prostitutes by having Cathy willingly choose to become a prostitute. This topic is important to address because the image of fallen women and prostitutes was once ignored in American novels during the 19th century, but in the 20th century they became explicitly described. This change slowly progressed as industrialization expanded to form urban areas and traditional values declined. Since there was a decrease in marriage, prostitution was largely apparent in certain parts of the city and became more tolerated in society. Though prostitutes were not accepted in polite society, their presence could not be ignored.

First, Louisa May Alcott creates Rachel, a fallen woman, who tries to find legitimate work but experiences harsh discrimination from self-proclaimed Christian women. Since this harsh treatment toward a fallen woman was typical in the 19th century, Alcott illustrates the dire circumstances that a woman may have confronted after being typecasted as a sinful woman. Since Alcott wrote her novel in the latter half of the 19th century, she had to carefully introduce Rachel as a minor character in order to address this issue of discrimination against fallen woman. Alcott sequences the plot and characterizations so that the reader is encouraged to question why fallen women are
persecuted without attacking the readers, who may have exhibited a similarly negative response to a fallen woman.

Next, Stephen Crane uses his journalistic skills to report on the harsh conditions of living in an impoverished urban tenement. He portrays how difficult it was for an uneducated 19th century woman to escape from the city slums. Since Maggie is compassionate and sensitive, she fails to successfully adapt to a harsh life of prostitution and dies, a realistic ending for many 19th century prostitutes. Yet, the manner in which Crane has her die, either by murder or suicide, is also an more important issue. By allowing Maggie to kill herself, Crane allows her to preserve what is left of her dignity, but by having a fat man murder her, she becomes a victim of her circumstance. Besides the previously mentioned editorial reasons, Crane creates such varied endings to highlight the social injustices that poor women had to endure without the chance of living a decent life.

In Sanctuary, Faulkner interrogates the Southern attitude concerning gender and sexuality through the lives of Ruby and Temple. He also challenges the notion of what is “good” and “bad” by having Ruby conform to a monogamous relationship and allows Temple to experiment with her sexuality. By doing this, Faulkner encourages his readers to question what criteria they use to judge if a woman is “good” or “bad.” He conveys the message that the Old South’s rigid classification of women is flawed because there is a vast chasm between what the southern society considers moral and how the privileged society is treated. Yet, regardless of which social class a woman comes from, she is expected to repress her sexuality.
In *East of Eden*, Steinbeck does not let social expectations impede Cathy’s determination to obtain independence, for she willingly chooses to prostitute herself for money. Though she has the opportunity to have a legitimate teaching job, she finds that the role of a teacher is too limiting, and she is not willing to sacrifice her individual freedom. Adamant about living her life on her own terms, Cathy destroys anyone that gets in her way. Yet, she is not completely heartless. When her husband tries to prevent her from leaving she does not kill him. She also wills her fortune to her son. Steinbeck has Cathy go to such extreme measures to suggest that women are not allowed the same freedom as men. It is only through prostitution that Cathy is free to do as she pleases and acquire the financial means to support herself.

Overall, each author specifically addresses society’s attitude toward fallen women and prostitutes during particular historical periods throughout the United States. Although contemporary United States society no longer socially ostracizes women who engage in premarital sex, prostitution is still federally criminalized in most American states. In exploring the lives of fallen women and prostitutes, these four authors gives us a view of how women responded to and even challenged the social mores of their time. I hope that other literary scholars will study how contemporary authors address the fluctuating social attitude toward sexually active women, exploring how women not only are shaped by social expectations, but also attempt to reshape those social roles.
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