"To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale!": Endo/Exo-Writer Perspectives of Nineteenth-Century Sex Workers in *Madeleine, An Autobiography* and *Mary Barton*

Katie Brandt Sartain

Abstract
This article analyses two portrayals of the nineteenth-century female sex worker: *Madeleine, An Autobiography,* written from the endo-perspective of the anonymous narrator, and *Mary Barton*, written from the exo-perspective of Elizabeth Gaskell. By placing these two texts in conversation, this project aims to illuminate the range of discourses that emerged about female sex workers during this period, and more broadly, the difficulties that arise when writers attempt to represent subalternity in the depiction of historically occluded identity groups. Through a comparison of the "outcast prostitute" Esther Barton in Gaskell's novel with the first-person autobiographical account of Madeleine Blair, the article offers a comprehensive account of the lives of these women and explores the discursive specificities of the authors' construction of the female sex worker in relation to other accounts of sex work. Attention is also given the ideologemes surrounding sex work that prevail in Western culture and the consequences they have for people within that community today.

Keywords
addiction; authority; genre; ideologeme; prostitution; representation; sex work

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"To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale!": Endo/Exo-Writer Perspectives of Nineteenth-Century Sex Workers in *Madeleine, An Autobiography* and *Mary Barton*

Katie Brandt Sartain

> Misery and destitution are the fruitful parents of prostitution…Ninety-nine fallen women out of every one-hundred are prostitutes through circumstance, not through inclination.
>
> "A Few Words on the 'Social Evil'" *Reynold's Monthly* (22 April 1860)

> It is this weird combination of pride and shame that makes you want to snap at the feminist author, like a dog in a pack. Perhaps it is also what gives her an audience; I don't know. But for her to raise the issues that she sweetly raised in her earnest elf voice – the middle-aged woman pretending that humiliation is an especially smart kind of game, together with the casual mention of her experience with prostitution – and yet to leave out the agonized face? No way.
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> Mary Gaitskill, "The Agonized Face" (2005: 22)

Introduction

Very recently, the Manhattan district attorney's office made the decision to stop prosecuting sex workers for criminal offenses. As Jonah E. Bromwich writes in an article from the *New York Times* in April 2021, "the announcement represents a substantive shift in the Manhattan district attorney's approach to prostitution. Many of the cases [the D.A.] moved to dismiss dated to the 1970s and 1980s, when New York waged a war against prostitution in an effort to clean up its image as a center of iniquity and vice" (2021: 23). While suggesting that the state's decision may indeed indicate a progressive change in legal praxis (and with it, potentially an improvement in the quality of the daily lives of sex workers in New York), Bromwich's article

falls into commonly-used rhetorical tropes surrounding sex work: prostitution is a "war" to be won; officials need to "clean up" sex workers from our society; selling sex or buying the services of a sex worker is a "vice"; those who partake in these activities engage in "iniquity"; and cities are the "center" or locus of prostitution. Even Bromwich's favouring of the word "prostitution" over "sex work" is fraught with the problematics of language from the exo-writer.[1] Despite their inclusion in a piece about a progressive policy change, these words recycle many of the same religious, moral, and geographical arguments that well-meaning middle-class philanthropists and borderline-voyeuristic, truth-seeking journalists have espoused about sex work since the early nineteenth century. These aspects are better clarified if we contrast Bromwich's language with the following quotation from an article in *The New Republic* by author and former sex worker Melissa Gira Grant:

> For so long, the overwhelming narrative around sex work and human trafficking has had very little to do with the lives of actual sex workers or victims of trafficking. It was a story told again and again about heroic cops and depraved men, girls for sale in plain sight, pimps in grocery store parking lots, a monotonous evening news moral panic.
>
> (2021)

Though both pieces positively frame the shift towards decriminalising sex work in the United States, Grant's analysis deftly articulates how the enduring tropes surrounding sex work – the very tropes Bromwich upholds – engender very real problems for those with that lived experience, regardless of their benign intent. This raises important questions about who should write, teach, or talk about sex work. Does Grant's lived experience mean we should privilege her authority? Is Bromwich too removed from the lived experience to understand his journalism's usage of stereotypes? Can representation only happen from within a group? And should it?

In order to address the broader socio-literary implications of the problematics of representation from within the endo/exo-writer paradigm, I analyse two works that offer portrayals of the nineteenth-century female sex worker: *Madeleine, An Autobiography*, written anonymously from an endo-perspective in 1919, published in 1935, yet set in the years after the American Civil War; and *Mary Barton*, written from the exo-perspective of Elizabeth Gaskell, published in 1848. The terms "endo-" and "exo-class" were coined by Lennard J. Davis who defines them as follows*:* "Endo writers portray the class to which they belong, whereas Exo authors describe the poor from the perspective of the middle class" (2020). I have expanded these terms to not only focus on class, but on any representation of a group or identity from inside or outside of that group. As such, I use the prefixes *endo-* and *exo-* to refer to writers that are either a part of, or external to, the sex work community. My goal in comparing these two texts is not to merely highlight similarities and differences or to present a strict hierarchy that

[1] The term "sex work" was coined by American sex worker Carol Leigh (also known as the Scarlot Harlot) in 1980. In her essay, "Inventing Sex Work," Leigh wrote, "The usage of the term 'sex work' marks the beginning of a movement. It acknowledges the work we do rather than defines us by our status" (1987). In my own work, I will defer to Leigh's term, which is increasingly becoming the accepted wording and, more importantly, the one preferred and used by those within the community, as opposed to the more pejorative term "prostitution" (among others) unless they are being used by another writer.

prioritises a true, more authoritative endo-writer portrayal over a caricaturised exo-writer one; rather, I aim to create a discourse between different works to better understand the range of descriptions that did and did not emerge about female sex workers between the Victorian age and the early twentieth century, and more broadly, to highlight the difficulties that arise when writers attempt to represent subalternity in the depiction of historically occluded groups or identities. My examination of these two texts considers genre, perspective, and writerly motive to describe the experience of women who engaged in sex work during the mid- to late-nineteenth century in England and the United States. Not only do I aim to illuminate the difficulties of writing the other by drawing attention to some of the ideologemes[2] that the exo-writer upholds in her depiction, but I also want to highlight the typologies and stereotypes to which the endo-writer adheres. Through a comparison of the "outcast prostitute" character Esther Barton in Gaskell's novel with the first-person autobiographical account of Madeleine Blair (the soubriquet of the anonymous narrator), and through a consideration of historical records, examples from other novels contemporary to the texts, and additional first-person stories and biographical information, this article intends to offer a fuller account of the lives of these women. Attention will be given to what discursive and imaginative possibilities both texts allow for in their construction of the female sex worker in the nineteenth century as well as to what both *Mary Barton* and *Madeleine* omit in their portrayals. Lastly, I analyse how both stories use conventions of the spiritual autobiography and contribute to developing the recovery narratives and twelve-step self-help discourse that would become dominant in the mid-twentieth century alongside the importance of first-person authority and personal experience in this addiction and recovery discourse. By comparing these two texts to each other and to other accounts of sex work from the nineteenth century, I hope to illuminate the prevailing language, themes, motives, successes, and problematics of the representation of nineteenth-century sex workers from both endo- and exo-writers and, more broadly, to draw attention to the harmful ideologemes surrounding sex work that still prevail today and the consequences they have for people within that community.

Sex Work in the 1800s

Unfortunately, we have scant documented first-hand evidence of the experiences of women who sold sex in England and the United States in the nineteenth century, and scholars and historians of the period have acknowledged this gap in the available historical records. In *London's Shadows: The Dark Side of the Victorian City*, Drew D. Gray[3] asserts, "The testimony of East End prostitutes is sadly lost to us (if they ever existed at all) and we are reliant on sifting through those who wrote about women they 'rescued' on the streets" (Gray 2010: 152). Gray acknowledges the difficulty of consulting authoritative sources due to their absence from the historical records. Here, Gray alights on one of the primary concerns of the endo/exo-writer paradigm in that endo-accounts, by their very nature, are elusive. As many scholars have noted, history is largely constructed, and systems of structural classism, sexism, and racism work to

[2] An ideologeme functions as a commonly occurring descriptive feature for a particular group or identity, similar to a stereotype. It was initially defined by Fredric Jameson as "the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourse of the social classed" (1981: 76).

[3] A lecturer in the history of crime and the head of the history department at Northampton University, Gray would be categorised as an exo-writer.

deny historical representation of minority, underrepresented, or subaltern peoples.[4] As such, a large portion of exo-writer-penned historical accounts, both new and old, that have aimed to uncover these hidden existences often participate in the same derogatory tropes, caricaturising, and erasure that they attempt to mitigate through immersive or archival study. This attitude is evident, for example, in Friederich Engels's description of the London East End:

> Here lives the poorest of the poor, the worst paid workers with thieves and victims of prostitution, indiscriminately huddled together, the majority Irish, or of Irish extraction, and those who have not yet sunk in the whirlpool of moral ruin which surrounds them, sinking daily deeper, losing daily more and more of their power to resist the demoralizing influence of want, filth, and evil surroundings.
>
> ([1845] 2009: 40)

Although he describes himself as one of "the hundreds and thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other" (37), Engels cannot conceal his upper-middle-class merchant upbringing that defines him as an exo-writer, a sort of "slumming gentleman." Even his habitation with Mary Smith, a poor, Irish sex worker, does not prevent him from linking sex work to poverty (a fair assessment at the time) but also to violence, theft, immorality, disease, and weakness. Why did Engels not just let Mary herself tell us about her experience instead of filtering it through a more privileged, male perspective? Despite its attempts to show the horrors of industrialisation in England, his text denies all of its human subjects – the factory workers, drunkards, the Irish, and the "victims of prostitution" – agency in telling their own story: Engels presents no dialogue or direct quotation at all from the people with whom he briefly lived and studied for his text; they inhabit no authorial position whatsoever.

It was not just the ethnographers, anthropologists, and literary journalists who described sex work in the terms of victimhood, vice, disease, and descent into bad morals. British and American newspapers of the nineteenth century brim with editorials and police blotters whose titles advocate lament with titles such as "A Few Words on The 'Social Evil'" (*Reynold's Newspaper* 1860: 506) or "A Girl Led Astray" (*St. Louis Globe-Democrat* 1876: 8).[5] One such piece, titled "Horrors of Prostitution," published in the British paper *The Morning Chronicle* in 1830 outlines the grim tale of Elizabeth Glover, described as a woman in a "deplorable situation" that had been "labouring for some time under the venereal disease, and […] had a large ulcer in a state of gangrene…a quantity of deleterious matter had been given her for the purpose of procuring abortion" (3). Despite surgeons' efforts to save them, both Elizabeth and her unborn child ultimately died. In another example entitled "Prostitution in Chicago" from 1866 the author opines, "it is true, too true, that the hydra-headed monster basks shamelessly in

[4] In *The Content of the Form*, White makes the important claim that what properly gets called "history," including so-called non-narrative forms of historiography like archive and chronicle (as opposed to texts written *about* the events of history), is in fact a form of historical representation (1987:6). Spivak revisits this argument: "the authority of the author is matched by the control of the archon, the official custodian of truth. It is archivization that interests us, naturally" (2003: 205). For Spivak, both the archive and the fictional text receive their authority from a subjective source, and neither should be fetishised as truth.

[5] The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* is a newspaper that Madeleine peruses in search of work: "in the restaurant where I ate breakfast, I picked up a copy of *The Globe-Democrat* and looked over the 'Help Wanted' advertisements" (*Madeleine* [1935] 1986*:* 34).

the sunlight of our city, sucking the lifeblood of our youngest and best. It is true that hundreds, nay thousands, of abandoned, wretched women ply their sinful calling in Chicago" (*St. Louis Globe-Democrat* 1866: n.p.).[6] These pieces target sex workers as carriers of disease and creators of unwanted children. Metaphorically, they describe prostitution as a nebulous "monster" of the dark that preys on innocent, potentially underaged, victims. These examples confirm that newspapers daily exposed scads of middle-class readers in Britain and the States to "the horrors of prostitution" in the strange combination of disgust and pity. Importantly, as Gray notes, "the presentation of the news was becoming more important than the news story itself" (2010: 102). As such, these accounts sensationalised and constructed their stories so as to be more desirable to the ever-growing reading public audience of the mid-to-late 1800s.

Even contemporary cultural historians like Gray rely on these same sources (newspapers, crime statistics, court records) and use language that perpetuates the same ideologemes of the Victorian chroniclers of sex workers that he examines, once again demonstrating that modern writers have not shed these tropes. Take for example this excerpt from his chapter on sex work titled "City of Dreadful Delights: Vice, Prostitution in Victorian Society":

> In late Victorian London prostitution occupied the minds of many social commentators, journalists, feminists, and reformers as well as magistrates and the policing authorities. Prostitution was a problem: a social problem and an individual problem for the women involved. Indeed we might add that it has ever been thus and remains the case today.
>
> (2010:165)

Gray's summative remarks, well-intentioned as they may be, rehearse the same talking points of the reformers and philanthropists that he researches. He frames sex work as a societal and personal ill, not just for the Victorian prostitute, but for women in the field today as well. In this problem and solution structure, Gray's linkage of vice in the East End to the issue of sex work today seems myopic at best and harmful at worst.

The Sex Worker in *Mary Barton*

In many ways, Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton* perpetuates several of the ideologemes about sex work that occur in the writings of Engels and Gray: disease, vice, crime, immorality – classic targets of Victorian bourgeoise disgust. The novel was immensely successful at the time of its publication in 1848, and critics and general readers alike praised its author's faithful and humanising depiction of the urban poor. An exo-writer both in terms of class and first-hand experience with sex work, Gaskell was born to middle-class parents, married within the middle class, and made considerable money writing novels, as Shirly Foster notices in her Introduction (Foster 2006: vii-xxvi). However, certain elements of *Mary Barton*, including its genre, perspective, and motive, offer meaningful insights into the life of the nineteenth-century sex worker. To start, there are some aspects of Gaskell's personal life that surface subtly yet purposefully in the tragic figure of the fallen woman Esther Barton. One of them is child loss.

[6] This quotation is particularly relevant considering Madeleine's description of the extent and types of brothels in Chicago not long after this time.

One need only look as far as the "Preface" for the first evidence of this, as Gaskell writes, "Three years ago, I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself with writing a work of fiction" ([1848] 2006: 3). The circumstance to which Gaskell alludes is the death of her young son, Willie, in 1845, the trauma of which was the creative impetus for the novel. In the novel itself, in a long *mea culpa*-style origin story told to Jem, Esther too laments the death of a young daughter, "My darling! My darling! Even after death I may not see thee, my own sweet one! She was so good! – like a little angel!" (157). While these words spoken by Esther smack of rather generic melodrama, the narrator describes her not as a stereotypical hysteric or a disorderly drunk, but as a woman vacillating between "wild vehemence, almost amounting to insanity," "the quiet of despair," (157), and then speaking in tones "thrillingly earnest" (160), mirroring Gaskell's own grief and anxiety from the "Preface." Unlike Engel's absent testimony, Gaskell's Esther has her own feelings, life story, and most importantly, her own words. So, although Gaskell herself was not a sex worker, her inclusion of Esther's lost daughter, a link to her own womanly trauma, and the complex depiction of Esther's external circumstances and internal consciousness work together to create a fuller (and certainly more sympathetic) depiction of the women who sold their bodies in nineteenth-century London.

Also, it is important to consider is that *Mary Barton* is a novel. By its very genre, it cannot propose to present either strictly objective fact or strictly subjective opinion; if it did, it would no longer be a fiction but instead an editorial or manifesto, or a work of reportage, anthropology, history, or scientific study. Gaskell explains the imaginative quality of the text when she herself qualifies it as "a work of fiction," "the tale," and a piece that aims to depict "the romance" in the lives of the London poor (3). Nevertheless, Gaskell self-admittedly and painstakingly invested her novels in the project of realism, as she proclaims, "I have tried to write truthfully" (4). Scholars of Gaskell have more than confirmed this through her letters and notes to her manuscripts: "*Mary Barton* actually represents direct authorial experience – a difference evident in its more psychologically convincing characters and plausible occurrences. Like these earlier writers, however, Gaskell did additionally draw on secondary factual sources for some of her detail" (Foster 2006: xi). These secondary sources included her husband's studies on regional dialect and sociological works akin to Engels's text (Foster 2006: xi). Moreover, Foster's claim that the novel can be tied to "direct authorial experience" complicate her exo-writer, reinforcing Gaskell's commitment to creating a faithful and accurate picture of her subject and the extent to which her own personal tragedies and traumas influenced her crafting of Esther's character in the text.

Personally invested in the narrative as she may have been, Gaskell still inevitably employs some common Victorian cultural and literary traditions and ideologemes in characterising Esther. The most striking example is the trope of the "fallen woman." As Amanda Anderson notes, "Oscilating between victim and threat, effect and cause, the fallen woman both represented and precipitated multifaceted problems of agency" (Anderson 2018: 16-17). With Esther, this is certainly the case; as an absent character for much of the narrative, her story nevertheless drives the narrative events prior to her appearance. Her agency is powerful yet abstracted. When we first hear of Esther, she has not yet commenced her life on the street, but her downfall is heavily foreshadowed by the other characters. Her brother-in-law, John Barton, remarks of Esther's prospects, "Says I, 'Esther, I see what you'll end at with your artificials and your fly-away veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you'll be a street-walker, Esther, and then, don't you go think I'll have you darken my door'"

(Gaskell [1848] 2006: 9). Barton's admonition pre-empts Esther's "end" with the movement not just from honest to dishonest but also from light to dark and geographically, from country to town). Barton's words represent the idea in Victorian culture that women could fall prey to a life of prostitution through questionable social, marital, or sexual behaviour and even the "love of finery, her spirited temper, the fact that she was 'puffed up;' all argue that she has fallen and will end up a streetwalker as [Barton] predicted" (Anderson 2018: 114).

Much of the narrative action of the novel also turns on Mary's naivety and foolhardiness in her relationship with Harry Carson, described as "a bubble blown out of vanity" and "a secret pleasure" (Gaskell [1848] 2006: 113). Believing she must sacrifice her happiness with Jem "as a penance for giddy flirting" (129), Gaskell ventriloquises the fallen woman not just in Esther, but also in Mary's romantic predicament. Mary's mysterious absent aunt's descent serves as a premonition of what her fate could have been had she continued her vain and flighty ways. To reinforce Mary's precarious state, Gaskell often links the two characters, as she does when Barton muses on his daughter: "he often looked at Mary, and wished she were not so like her aunt, for the very bodily likeness seemed to suggest the possibility of a similar likeness in fate; and then this idea enraged his irritable mind, and he became anxious and suspicious about Mary's conduct" (124). Barton's anxieties are aesthetic and represent the fatalism of the fallen woman as encrypted in Mary's appearance and biology, "remind[ing] the author that he can never fully own himself, and that his own history, as well as the story he tells about that history is determined by a number of forces beyond his control" (Anderson 2018: 11). Of course, Gaskell passes judgement on male conduct too when she notes that Carson is indeed, "plotting to ruin a young girl" (Gaskell [1848] 2006: 134) with his "feeling that at any price he must have her" (131). The recognition of the male part of the equation catalyses the metaleptic shift in which "on the one hand the fallen woman is seen as victimized or even constituted by forces exceeding her control…[and] on the other hand she can serve as a threatening manifestation of the very forces that constituted her" (Anderson 2018; 16). Other novels of the time, like Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) also mobilise the metalepsis of the fallen woman, such as in the reoccurring imagery of "Mrs. Sparsit's Staircase": "She erected in her mind a mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom; and down those stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she saw Louisa coming" (Dickens [1854] 2006: 151). Just as Gaskell alerted us to the dangers of improper womanly behaviour with Esther and Mary, Dickens illustrates Louisa's potentially devastating imprudent relationship with Harthouse, the handsome libertine out to "destroy what was there in her soul" (125). So, while authors of the time certainly did pass considerable judgment on the women who found themselves at the bottom of the metaphorical moral staircase, the men who tempted them and the societal conditions forced upon them were not without admonition.

Despite the tropes and ideologemes common to Victorian fiction upon which she draws, Gaskell offers creative possibilities of representing sex work through her classically-Victorian first-person omniscient narrator. Gaskell's narrator is opinionated, invested, and powerful, but not without her limitations. What exactly does she offer us in terms of the exo-writer's representation? As Jonathan Culler has noted, the term "omniscience" has become a catch-all for narrative perspective. Still, he does praise "those nineteenth century [sic] novels with extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrators who present themselves as *histors*: spokespersons of authority who judiciously sift and present information, know the innermost secrets of characters, reveal what they would keep hidden, and offer sage reflections on the foibles of humankind" (Culler 2004: 31). The narrator of *Mary Barton* is one such "*histor*," privy to the

physical sensations and consciousness of the characters, letting us know when they feel "weak in body, and unhappy in mind" (Gaskell [1848] 2006: 139) when the characters themselves do not do so through dialogue. This narrator also inserts herself to offer observations, ask questions, or fill gaps in the action not indicated in the text. One of the most striking instances of this occurs in the violent meeting between John and Esther:

> He flung her, trembling, sinking, fainting from him, and strode away. She fell with a feeble scream...unable to rise. A policeman came up in time to see the close of these occurrences, and concluding from Esther's unsteady, reeling fall, that she was tipsy, took her in her half-unconscious state to the lock-ups for the night...The next morning, she was taken to the New Bailey. It was a clear case of disorderly vagrancy, and she was committed to prison for a month. (122)

In this scene, John has violently accosted Esther, still furious at the shame she has brought the family and greatly uneased by his association of her with his daughter. He has shoved her with such force that she is nearly rendered unconscious. However, rather than arresting John Barton for assaulting Esther, it is Esther who is assumed to be the agitator in "a clear case of disorderly vagrancy." The narrator and reader, of course, know this to be untrue, having been involved in the scene from the start. Gaskell's omniscient narrator, then, supplies a version of events that court records from the New Bailey would never show.[7] Esther's position as a lower-class street prostitute renders her true experience unknowable to the police and therefore to the historical record, a situation that only the novelist and her narrator can remedy. Esther herself asserts, "The story of my life is wanted to give force to my speech…You must hear it, and I must tell it" (156). Both Esther and the narrator seem fully conscious of the discursive lacuna that exists when it comes to stories like Esther's. To show this, after the previous incident with John and just before the meeting between Esther and Jem, the narrator laments, "To whom shall the outcast prostitute tell her tale! Who will give her help in the day of need? Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean" (154). Gaskell's first question, punctuated as an exclamation, highlights the impossibility of truly knowing Esther, as she offers no real answer. The second question, too, remains unanswered as she acknowledges the existing prejudices (her own included) associated with sex workers at the time, resurrecting the disease imagery we have already seen in Engels and others, this time in Biblical terms with phraseology such as "leper-sin" and "unclean," in reference to Esther's venereal disease. While Gaskell seems desirous of telling "the tale," providing the reader with the information omitted from the historical record, the stereotypes she mobilises while doing so render her depiction fraught with the problems of exo-writer representation, characterising Esther as "the social force of generic conventions as well as the tension between reading and intersubjective encounters" (Anderson 2018: 126). Ultimately, although Gaskell does engage in moralisation, stereotyping, sensationalism, and judgement, she also offers possibilities for imagining and re-imagining the agency of the sex worker in the nineteenth century that strictly factual accounts did not and could not permit.

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[7] Again, consider Engel's immersive experience and heavy reliance on police and court records in *Conditions* as well as Gray's in *London's Shadows*. Scenes such as this demonstrate the problematics of privileging the archive and harken back to my previous inclusion of the work of Spivak and White.

A Contrasting Portrait: Sex Work in *Madeleine*

So, what can *Madeleine, An Autobiography*, written over half a century later in 1919 (though taking place in the mid- to late-nineteenth century), add to the cultural conversation regarding sex workers in the nineteenth century and just after that Gaskell had already contributed to? We may start, as we did with Gaskell, by focusing on the author. As Marcia Carlisle has noted in her Introduction to the 1986 edition of the text, "the identity of the author remains unknown" (1986: vi), and it continues to be so today. Most of what we do know about "Madeleine Blair," the pseudonym of the anonymous and presumed author, comes from her text itself. Even though Carlisle asks the important questions regarding *Madeleine*'s authorship as either endo- or exo- ("Is *Madeleine* a prostitute's autobiography written in her own words? Was the writing done by a prostitute, or is it her story as told to or reported by someone else?" [1986: vi]), for the purpose of this article, I defer to Carlisle's assessment that "there is sufficient reason to assume the text is authentic" (vi) and to her analysis of why she believes this to be the case. Madeleine's own explanation of how she landed on this name is found in the text (*Madeleine* [1935] 1986: 62).

Styled and titled as an autobiography in three parts, *Madeleine* unfolds the story of the eponymous anti-heroine from her upbringing as a middle-class Midwesterner in the 1860s to her family's economic downfall, to her entry into the world of sex work and, finally, to her spiritual rebirth. The author writes candidly about her time spent working in brothels across the United States, her unconventional relationships with men, her poverty and eventual economic independence, and her struggles with alcoholism to create a truly novel portrait of the nineteenth-century sex worker. Because the author of *Madeleine* writes from within the larger community or identity of sex workers, this portion of the paper addresses what divergences from and resemblances to the exo-writer text occur in representation from the endo-writer perspective as seen in *Madeleine*.

Alongside the authorial differences from *Mary Barton*, *Madeleine* offers its reader the experience of a nineteenth-century sex worker from a completely different genre: autobiography. As previously stated, the dually-operating fictionality and reliance on realism in Gaskell's novel imbue it with its representational power. Conversely, autobiographical writing has its own benefits, as the genre tends to imply a more authoritative narrative. Readers generally associate autobiography with a truer portrayal, a realer experience, the story "straight from the horse's mouth," so to speak; in essence, as misguided as our assumption may be, many consider autobiography to be closer to "truth." Instead of the first-person omniscient *histor* we find in Gaskell, who can flit from consciousness to consciousness and present events happening to any of the characters in her story in any desired chronological order, *Madeleine* can only offer us Madeleine: the limited first-person narration of her experiences, her feelings, and her motives. Yet, strangely, many of Madeleine's experiences, feelings, and motives do seem similar to those seen in *Mary Barton.* Several themes written into to the story of Gaskell's "outcast prostitute" Esther, in fact, reappear in Madeleine's account of her own life. Two of the most salient of these themes include child loss and venereal disease. Much like her unfortunate predecessor Esther, Madeleine loses two of her own children, one of whom dies in childbirth from complications from a sexually transmitted infection she received from the man in Kansas City. She describes the circumstances of contracting the disease as follows:

> When he saw I did not in the least understand what he was talking about he explained in detail. He had contracted a venereal disease which, if properly treated, was no worse than a severe cold. His physician had pronounced him cured, but he would not ask me to expose myself unless I fully understood that there was an element of risk….Much of his explanation was Greek to me: I understand thoroughly, although he made no intimation of it, that this man had found me starving in the streets; that he had fed and sheltered and clothed me; and that he did not demand payment. Nevertheless, he did expect it, and pleaded for it…I paid.
>
> (*Madeleine* [1935] 1986: 50)

Unlike the extraordinarily careful and concealed allusions to Esther's venereal disease in *Mary Barton*, Madeleine candidly reveals that she became infected after sleeping with a man who took her, a homeless, starving seventeen-year-old girl, off the streets. While clearly ignorant of the gravity of her circumstances when they occurred, in retrospect, Madeleine bluntly depicts the onset of her symptoms and time spent receiving treatment in a hospital with other women suffering from the same illness. Still, the specific disease is never mentioned by name and is only referred to generally in terms like "illness" (50), "the disease," and "this disorder" (51). Another experience that links Esther and Madeleine (and Gaskell herself) is child loss. As previously discussed, Esther initially goes out into the street in a desperate attempt to earn enough money to keep her starving daughter alive, ultimately failing. Madeleine suffers the untimely death of both of her children: the stillborn of her first unwanted pregnancy and later the devastating loss of her elder child, "Baby." When describing the first of the two losses, Madeleine's language is detached and cold: "I did not want a baby" (81); later, after she has just barely escaped death in childbirth, she relates, "when all danger was over and I was on the high-way to recovery the nurse told me of the baby girl whom a merciful Providence had taken to Himself" (84). There is no wailing grief, no pleading with God, and no bitter cries, a very different depiction from Esther's reaction. The death of Madeleine's first child is framed as a relief, both to her and to the dead baby. Ultimately, while both *Mary Barton* and *Madeleine* alight on similar experiences, the language and affect with which the endo- vs. exo-writer describes these events varies quite a bit.

What also starkly differs between the exo-depiction of sex work in *Mary Barton* and the endo-depiction in *Madeleine* is the emotional, financial, and spiritual independence that Madeleine ultimately gains through her decades of work as a sex worker and madam. In the late half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, there is a discursive shift away from the image of the prostitute as strictly a victim of circumstance, degraded by the evils around her, and forced into a life of iniquity. Instead, we see women who indicate they do indeed have social, marital, and financial freedoms outside of the stifling traditional heteronormative marriage customs of the time. Take, for example, the character of Aunt Helen in Agnes Smedley's 1929 *Daughter of Earth,* another first-person autobiographical account written by a woman. Cast out of the family home by the patriarch for her sexual promiscuity, like Esther, Aunt Helen's sex work offers her social and material comforts other women in more traditional roles, like her sister Elly, are denied. To her abusive brother-in-law, Helen proclaims:

> An' if I *was* a whore, John Rogers, I want to know who made me one! *You*, John Rogers! You! Elly ain't had enough money to buy grub and duds for herself and the kids. I've give her my wages each pay-day. Yes, an' you know it! If 'twasn't for my money, she'd have starved to

> death…I *won't* go in rags…I *won't* get married and let some mad boss me around and whip me and let me starve! *I've* a right to things.
>
> (Smedley [1929] 2011: 82-3, emphasis in original)

Gone is Gaskell's penitent and meek prostitute, begging for forgiveness. Instead, Helen proves to be completely different. She is not a repentant fallen woman, but a proud and defiant person, one who not only supports herself but uplifts her family as well. Helen's sex work allows her to assume the role of provider, but she also describes it as liberating – no one to "boss," "whip," "starve" her, or deny her of her "right." Instead, she actively chooses not to participate in the traditional roles of marriage and morality. While Helen's trajectory does not mirror Madeleine's perfectly, Madeleine also acknowledges her own freedom from oppressive cycles of poverty or domesticity. Upon her arrival in Chicago, Madeleine apprises the reader of her financial prowess: "I was no frightened girl seeking refuge from the terrors of the streets. I was a woman driving the best possible bargain for the sale of my body and soul…I knew the state of the market too well to make too many conditions" ([1935] 1986: 101). Later, after turning down multiple requests of marriage from her former client and long-time beau, Paul, she explains her resistance to their union in a series of rhetorical questions: "Why could he not take me as I was? Why could he not recognize me as an individual with a mind and soul of my own and cease from his efforts to remold me?" (252). Madeleine does not paint her trade in rosy tones, but what she does show us are the ways in which her path allowed her independence and formed her into a unique, thinking subject in ways that she believed a marriage or traditional lifestyle with Paul could not offer. Ultimately, these moments in *Madeleine* offer a story that does not fully confirm to previous depictions or commonly held societal beliefs about sex work in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps then we should view Madeleine's resistance to the already-circulating notions about sex work – that prostitutes were either helpless victims or hopeless moral morasses – as highly purposeful. One of her motives certainly seems to be to dispel the notion that most, if not all, prostitutes were forced into their work through sex slavery and trafficking. Instead, Madeleine offers a far more robust pastiche of the women she encountered: "the public prostitute, the clandestine prostitute, and the occasional prostitute…the trusting girl who had been betrayed, and the unfaithful wife…the college woman and the illiterate child of the slums…" (238). The list goes on. However, one type of prostitute which does not find her way into her multitudinous list is "the pure girl who had been trapped and violated and sold into slavery, and held a prisoner unable to effect her escape – the so-called 'white slave'" (238). Beholden as she remains to her ultimate desire to show the means of her "spiritual redintegration" (3), Madeleine wholly counters the narrative of the sexual exploitation of minors that so many newspapers reported on[8] and so many philanthropists, moralists, and reformers bemoaned.

[8] A quick search of the keywords "prostitution" and/or "prostitute" in British and American newspapers from 1830-1905 generated a good percentage of articles focused specifically on "juvenile prostitution" or the exploitation of young girls and women in some way.

The Omission of Sex

Oddly, for two texts invested in portraying the experience of sex workers, the act of sex itself is starkly missing. Writers often shock us with the consequences of promiscuous sex – familial and social exclusion, venereal disease, miscarriage and child death, alcoholism, and abject poverty – but descriptions of sex itself simply do not exist in these accounts. This omission is less surprising in Gaskell's novel, which targeted a middle-class audience; even the mere hint in print at what Esther actually *did* for a living would be considered scandalous and perhaps even pornographic by its public, who would have stigmatised it for contributing to the lowering of morals and the proliferation of vice that Gaskell critiques through Esther.[9] The closest the reader gets to any mention of sexual intercourse in *Mary Barton* is when Esther describes the moment she turned to prostitution: "I went out into the street one January night" ([1848] 2006: 157); a few lines later, Esther simply refers to it as "that" when she desponds, "I've done that since, which separates us as far asunder as heaven and hell can be" (157). We know Esther's occupation because Gaskell has already told us, but Gaskell shies away from describing the particulars of Esther's trade. The brief and passing implication of Esther's venereal disease in the scene where she refuses to kiss Mary is the only other mention of the consequences of sexual intercourse (235). In *Madeleine*, the author certainly allows the reader a closer peek into the boudoir than Gaskell, but even her descriptions of what her actual work entailed are vague at best. This vagueness starts when we first learn of Madeleine's decision to become sexually active at the age of seventeen:

> I had made a terrific effort to keep above the level of my environment and that of my forbidden companions. My mother's training and example, and my own inherent sense of decency, fought for the right. My environment and social isolation fought against it. The result was inevitable; I lost the battle. When I was seventeen the family affairs seemed to have reached their lowest level.
>
> (*Madeleine* [1935] 1986: 13)

Madeleine describes the loss of her virginity, as a "lost battle," a moral precursor to the family's plummeting social and economic status, deploying the all-too-familiar fallen woman trope as she describes her unsuccessful "terrific effort to keep above" her surroundings, her own desire to have sex, and the inevitable sliding down in to the "lowest level" when she does so. Equally hazy are the descriptions of Madeleine's later sexual experiences in brothels. This ambiguity is exemplified by the following passage in which Madeleine explains that, while living in Chicago, she was asked by her madam to play a virgin for a wealthy elderly client's desire to rape young girls:

> I was to say that I lived at home with my parents and was attending school…he would begin making advances to me. I must repulse him, and he would endeavor to overcome my scruples. The greater his difficulty in overcoming them, and the more modest and refined I appeared to

[9] Take for example, the outcry at the release of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* fifty years later. Hardy himself describes it in his 1912 postscript to the text as "a shrill crescendo" and "a storm of words" during which critics "flung [the book] across the room" for Hardy's crass "treatment of a difficult subject" ([1895] 1978: 8), namely the difficulties of marriage and sexual relations in England.

> be, the greater his relish for the debauchery; and he would give me that much more money for the supposed injury done.
>
> (110)

Madeleine rather modestly, much like the character she plays in this scene, avoids providing all explicit descriptions of what sex acts the old man actually pays for. Instead, she uses the hyper-ambiguous and reserved language of “making advances,” “overcome my scruples,” “the debauchery,” and “the supposed injury done” (110). Of course, any mildly imaginative reader can fill in the blanks of what occurs between Madeleine and the “old *roué*” (109), but Madeleine chooses to remain vague. Whether due to her “mother’s training” (13), her educated upbringing, or her own self-conscious lapse into ideologemes, much like Gaskell, even the first-person sex worker omits the act of sex itself. By refusing to lift the veil of secrecy surrounding the most intimate of experiences of their sex workers, these authors avoided mobilising the pornographic in pursuit of their audience and refused offering to their audience’s gaze the innermost details of the private, sexual experiences of women like Esther and Madeleine.

Addiction, Recovery Narratives, and Sex Work

Absent as sex may be from the two stories, addiction plays a vital role in the lives of Esther and Madeleine and shows the importance of sex workers’ stories in the development of recovery narratives. Both Gaskell and *Madeleine*’s author directly tie drinking and compulsive gambling to sex workers’ experiences. In *Mary Barton*, Esther describes her addiction to alcohol as a coping mechanism for her situation:

> I must have drink. Such as live like me could not bear life if they did not drink. It’s the only thing to keep us from suicide. If we did not drink, we could not stand the memory of what we have been, and the thought of where we are, for a day. If I go without food, without shelter, I must have dram. Oh! You don’t know the awful nights I have spent in prison for want of it.
>
> (Gaskell [1848] 2006: 159)

Gaskell frames Esther’s dependence on “drink” and “dram” as both a physical dependency and a spiritual malady; it is a form of self-medication that allows Esther relief from the emotional pain caused by the loss of her husband and daughter, her banishment from the family, and the physical distress caused by hunger and exposure. For Madeleine, gambling and alcohol become addictive habits that cannot be willed away. Early in the novel, Madeleine expressly refuses to drink, associating consumption of alcohol with her father’s own drunkenness and the slippage of her family into poverty. When she begins working in brothels, she continues to abstain while observing the regular usage of alcohol amongst her colleagues. Finally, Madeleine herself develops an addiction to gambling. She describes it as “shackles which held [her] soul in bondage” even as she refrained from consuming other substances: “there were times when I would have sold Paul for a stack of red chips. I had escaped the usual vices of my class, liquor and drugs, only to fall victim to as great an evil” ([1935]1986: 235). However, Madeleine cannot escape liquor forever; she secretly begins drinking in Chapter VI of Book III, “descend[ing] into the blackest depths of hell” (288) in her dependence, drinking to avoid the

stress of running her brothel in remote northern Canada and to forget her dead son and her doomed relationship with Paul.

While neither *Mary Barton* nor *Madeleine* represent exact models of the genre, they have elements that bear a striking resemblance to many of the traditional tenets of recovery narratives that began to flourish just after the turn of the nineteenth century and remain popular today. In these stories, the storyteller's authority is paramount to their ability to effect change. Although Madeleine's recovery from addiction is successful while Esther's is not, the language with which their respective authors describe the experience with substance abuse pre-empts many of the attitudes and sentiments associated not just with spiritual autobiography and conversion narratives but also with the principles of twelve-step self-help programmes. In my categorisation of *Mary Barton* and *Madeleine* as precursors to recovery narratives, I am largely continuing the work started by Robyn R. Warhol, who 'explore[s] the intersections among narration, subjectivity, identity, and addiction to alcohol in canonical mid-Victorian fiction and in the discourse of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (AA)" (2002: 97). The novels and texts of the Victorian era influenced the discourse of AA and how drunkenness was conceived in terms of moral and psychological frailty:

> When the founders of AA revived the idea that alcoholism is a disease, they did so in the context of a culture that insisted that drunkenness was the result of a moral failing or a psychological complex, or both, and that alcoholism is a behavior born of circumstances. The slippage between disease and self in AA discourse, then, reflects the ambiguous status of alcoholism in early-twentieth-century culture.
>
> (Warhol 2002: 100)

Fictional portrayals like Gaskell's which highlight powerlessness, the part of a recovery narrative referred to in the AA lexicon as "what it was like," did indeed work to shape later discourses surrounding addiction. In *Madeleine*, the connection is more explicit as "Book III" shows us not only "what it was like" for Madeleine in the height of her addiction to alcohol and gambling, but also "what happened" – the part of the recovery narrative in which the afflicted experiences a spiritual awakening, seen in Madeleine's meeting with a priest and rededication to sobriety. This latter stage is represented in the final scenes in which she pledges "'to abstain from the use of liquor for one year from this date and to avoid the occasion of temptation'" after which she and the priest together recite the Lord's Prayer ([1935]1986: 316). Madeleine wonders that "it was all so simple…that she had not thought it out for myself long before" (316). This scene anticipates several core rituals of twelve-step recovery: abstinence, time-counting and goal setting,[10] and the reliance on a higher power for strength, specifically through group recitation of the Lord's Prayer. All continue to be a part of self-help discourse and happen at the vast majority of AA meetings to this day. Even Madeleine's qualification of the plan's simplicity anticipates phraseology from the Big Book and the language of AA.[11] However, what

[10] While Madeleine makes her promise of sobriety for a year, which resembles nineteenth-century temperance pledges, the stress on periods of time of sobriety as opposed to forever is akin to AA's usage of "One day at a time."

[11] Other common AA sayings include the tautological "It works if you work it," "Keep it simple (stupid)," and "Work the steps or die." All stress the program's simplicity in relation to the addict's own willingness to participate.

neither account provides us with is the "what it's like now" portion of the story – the most important part for the didactic ends of recovery narratives, both written in the Big Book and spoken at meetings across the country. Still, both *Mary Barton* and *Madeleine* offer complex and varied portraits of addiction, which anticipate the attitudes and language that would emerge fully in the decades to follow.

Conclusion

I would like to end by returning to the second epigraph of this article, taken from a short story by contemporary novelist Mary Gaitskill, herself a former sex worker (Laurence 2006). The excerpt perfectly demonstrates the complexities of representing sex work. Along with *Madeleine* and the work of Gira Grant, Gaitskill's excerpt reminds us that the endo-portrayal is not always wholly positive. Nor can we definitively say that an exo-portrayal, like the one offered in *Mary Barton*, or in Bromwich's journalism, is wholly negative. What all of these stories about sex work demonstrate is the immense power of texts, novels, newspapers, memoirs, the archive and *language* to perpetuate or dismantle existing harmful ideologemes and enact or prevent real change in oppressed or occluded peoples' lives. Placed in conversation together, these texts contribute to offering a fuller, more accurate depiction of sex workers in the nineteenth century, providing a means of beginning to unravel the many complexities of a topic that persists in its importance and difficulty today.

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