

Victim of Seduction or Vicious Woman?: Conceptions of the Prostitute at the Philadelphia Magdalen Society, 1800-1850

Rodney Hessinger

St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota

The seduction narrative, initially popularized in late eighteenth-century America, was losing some of its explanatory power as the nineteenth century progressed. By 1833, popular bourgeois moralist William Alcott could declare with complete propriety: "In nineteen cases out of twenty, of illicit conduct, there is perhaps, no seduction at all; the passion, the absence of virtue, and the crime, being all mutual." As his statement implies, however, Alcott allowed some room for the possibility of young male rakes committing seduction. Thus he admitted: "But there are such monsters on the earth's surface. There are individuals to be found, who boast of their inhuman depredations on those whom it ought to be their highest happiness to protect and aid, rather than injure." Monsters, however, were not numerous. Alcott was insistent that few young women could blame young men for their transgressions: "Let young women, however, be aware; let them be *well* aware, that few, indeed, are the cases in which this apology can possibly avail them."¹ Alcott's comments suggest that there may have been some difficulty in applying the seduction motif to the daily world of nineteenth-century America.

When first gaining popularity, the seduction narrative had in fact registered real social problems encountered by Americans in the late eighteenth century. Booming rates of bastardy and premarital pregnancy, coupled with a growing geographic mobility of male youth, generated fears about the dangers faced by young women on the marriage market. Americans articulated these fears in the form of seduction fiction. Popular novels and periodical short stories, the most famous being *Charlotte Temple* (1794) and *The Coquette* (1797), depicted the difficulties facing young women who had gained the benefit of more freedom from parents and community in courtship, but as a result were exposed to greater exploitation at the hands of mobile and unrestrained young men. Although grounded in tangible social problems, the fears driving seduction fiction produced exaggerated cultural stereotypes. Seduction fiction typically drew its young male and female characters in stark contrast to one another. Male immorality was counterposed to female virtue and chastity in these tales. Innocent young women were deceived into the expectation of marriage by licentious young men. After the rake had fulfilled his sexual designs, he would abandon the woman, often with child, to suffer the consequences of their illicit encounters. Writers of these cautionary tales urged young women to seek the protective guidance of parents in entering the dan-

gerous marriage market. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Americans pushed the view of victimized womanhood to its logical extremes. Prostitutes were depicted as victims of seduction. After suffering the abandonment of the libertine, women were forsaken by family and community and forced to subsist on the profits of the sex trade.²

If the opening comments of William Alcott suggest that the image of victimized womanhood had in some measure been challenged by the mid-nineteenth century, his commentary also reveals some rethinking of the image of predatory masculinity. The prescriptive message implicit in Alcott's castigation of male seducers, that men "ought" to be women's protectors, suggests that at least some responsibility for preventing illicit sexual encounters had shifted to young men. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a new strategy of containing sexual disorder had in fact appeared: a purity code for men had been constructed, demanding male sexual self-control.³ Yet if new demands for male sexual self-control arose in mid-nineteenth century America, historians have provided abundant evidence that assumptions about female sexual propriety, cohering about a half-century earlier, very much retained their force through (and beyond) the antebellum years.⁴ Alcott's commentary on seduction raises as many questions as it answers. While he reveals a growing skepticism about the conventional portrait of victimized womanhood, he fails to offer an alternative reading of the seduction narrative.

Many of Alcott's fellow bourgeois commentators were not as even-handed as he in spreading blame for licentious liaisons. The seduction narrative did not disappear as the nineteenth century progressed, but it was contested on certain grounds. If seduction novels like *Charlotte Temple*—in which female innocence fell to male libertinism—could remain tremendously popular, one might ask which women could still be seen as victims of male predations and which could not. Furthermore, how did bourgeois males relate to these women of different character? Urban prostitution supported by a bourgeois sporting culture blossomed at the same time that middle-class commentators were trying to establish a chastity ideal for men.⁵ While historians have noted this inconsistency, they have not adequately addressed whether and how men may have resolved the tension between the double standard and respect for womanhood. This seeming contradiction might in part be explained by the development of a class-based view of womanhood.⁶ While sexual propriety was important when interacting with bourgeois women, promiscuity may have been considered more appropriate with women of the lower classes.⁷ Before such a class-based view of women was possible, the class-transcending gender construct embedded in the seduction narrative would have to be undermined.

A case history of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society provides a wonderful window into the difficulties that attended upholding the reductive understanding of illicit sex that the conventional seduction narrative presented. By

looking closely at the progress of the seduction narrative within the small world of the Magdalen Society, we might better understand how the image of victimized womanhood was besieged within larger society. The operators of the Magdalen Society initially attempted to describe the past of its clients in terms of the conventional seduction tale. The clash between the founders' preconceptions and the information presented to them by prostitutes ultimately revealed the limitations of the seduction narrative in dealing with the multiplicity of causes that produced early nineteenth-century prostitution. While the managers persistently held to the seduction narrative in interpreting their subjects, they ultimately found few Magdalens who fit their understanding of prostitution. Facing such difficulties, the Society betrayed a frustration that was expressed in blaming the women themselves rather than the men they initially had held accountable. Over the first half of the nineteenth century, the managers of the Magdalen Society paid increasing attention to the habits and lifestyle of the young women they encountered rather than the seduction schemes of young rakes they initially blamed for prostitution. According to Society leaders at mid-century, the young women under their charge had fallen into prostitution because of their participation in the vice-ridden lifestyle of the lower classes.

* * * * *

The Philadelphia Magdalen Society cast its mission in terms defined by the popular fiction of the early American republic. Founded in 1800, the Magdalen Society aimed to address the problem of prostitution. The centerpiece of the institution would be an asylum, where, according to the Constitution, the society might "aid in restoring to the paths of virtue,—to be instrumental in recovering to honest rank in life, those unhappy females, who in unguarded hour, have been robbed of their innocence."⁸ The founders of the Magdalen Society were prominent businessmen, doctors, clerics, and reformers within the Philadelphia community such as Episcopal Bishop William White, Robert Wharton, Edward Garrigues, and Dr. Benjamin Rush. Seduction literature obviously influenced a much broader spectrum of the population than the young female audience with which such fiction is typically associated.⁹ To the founders of the Magdalen Society, male treachery against female innocence explained the presence of prostitution in the young republic. For those who might have questioned the virtue of prostitutes the founders defended them in *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*: "Is there, I would ask, a village or hamlet in the United States, I might say universe, that has not fostered in its bosom the insidious murderer of female innocence?"¹⁰ Gendered notions of virtue undergirded the Magdalen Society's initial understanding of prostitution.

Founded by elite Philadelphians, one might expect to find a class agenda behind the Magdalen Society's operations. Clare Lyons has recently posited such a reading of this society. Lyons argues that the Magdalen Society managers, following the lead of popular writers of this period, used the seduction narrative to stigmatize working-class women as members of a sexually deviant "rabble." Lyons portrays popular fiction as a coercive strategy intended to flatten a vibrant alternative sexual culture extant in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Urging young women to practice chastity for their own protection, seduction tales undoubtedly worked to constrain women's sexual behavior. Yet popular writers, some of them outspoken advocates for the causes of women, wrote their tales as much out of sympathy for their subjects as out of a desire to enforce sexual propriety. Clearly, seduction tales had important costs for young women, but notions of sensibility and benevolence were at work within them as well. In the hands of the managers of the Magdalen Society, the notions of disinterested benevolence existing in popular seduction literature persisted. The managers did not initially see the young women as fundamentally different from themselves in terms of either class or character. The seduction narrative worked to block such associations.

Managers of the Magdalen Society, much like the leaders of Philadelphia's other charitable organizations of this period, saw poverty not as a fixed status, but as a fate that might befall any member of society. For Society managers, poverty was simply one of the inevitable downward steps on the path starting with seduction and ending in prostitution.¹¹ In early Society notes Magdalens were sometimes described as having reputable backgrounds.¹² Following closely the plot-line of contemporary fiction, poverty was the result of the abandonment of friends and family which naturally followed a young woman's seduction: "How many might have been saved, who, having made one false step, and finding themselves, though truly penitent, deserted by their friends, out-cast of society, and perishing for want of food, have madly rushed into the vortex of most abandoned prostitution."¹³

The founders' blindness to issues of class can be more fully observed by comparing their seduction rhetoric to the language of the Magdalen Hospital in London. Much like the seduction fiction writers who informed their efforts, the founders of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society drew many of their ideas from across the Atlantic. The Society deliberately named and modeled itself on the Magdalen Hospital founded in London in 1758.¹⁴ Borrowing, however, was selective. In this, the founders of the Magdalen Society were again following the lead of popular American writers. Late eighteenth-century American novelists and periodical writers had eschewed notions of male sensibility present in British fiction. American writers' cautionary tales were primarily concerned with warning young female readers to beware of young men, not with appealing to young men's feelings of sympathy.¹⁵

As suggested above, gendered notions of morality also structured the founding vision of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society. In contrast, the London organization seemed to give more room to class in its analysis of prostitution. This difference can be glimpsed in an article published by the founders of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society to announce their organization. The Philadelphia society included portions of a pamphlet from the London institution entitled "An account of the rise, progress, and present state of the MAGDALEN CHARITY, in London." While the Philadelphia founders were largely content to blame "bruttish man" for the seduction of young women, the London operators they excerpted at least gave some notice to the structural disadvantages which many women, lacking property, faced on the marriage market: "What virtue can be proof against such formidable seducers; who offer too commonly and too profusely promise to transport the thoughtless girls, from want, confinement and restraint of passions, to luxury, liberty, gaiety and joy?"¹⁶ The Philadelphia founders ignored this more complex explanation for the problems of seduction and prostitution. Their records reveal a reliance on the more simplistic narrative of fallen virtue.

After having secured the necessary funds, the Magdalen Society began to admit women regularly to its asylum in 1807 in the then-rural location of Sassafras and Schuylkill Second Streets (today 21st and Race).¹⁷ Previously, several women had received funds and lodging from "respectable" families, one even lodging with the family of Board of Managers Chairman John Harris.¹⁸ After the opening of the asylum all assistance would be offered exclusively on this site. The Magdalen Society would have a long, but frustrating, history. It lasted for over a century, eventually reborn in the early twentieth century as the White-Williams Foundation, a social service institution for school children. While in existence the Magdalen Society's asylum would admit only small numbers into its doors, averaging around ten women annually in its first decade, fitfully increasing to only about forty a year by mid-century.¹⁹

In its early years, the Philadelphia Magdalen Society recorded detailed entry notes about each woman taken under care.²⁰ These firmly demonstrate the deep influence of the popular seduction narrative.²¹ To be sure, the tension between the Society founders' preconceptions and the lived experiences of the Magdalens resulted in a mounting sense of frustration of the managers against these assisted women. Yet the seduction plot-line died neither easily nor completely. The notes reveal an important process of negotiation. At times the women's voices emerge in the construction of the narratives that gained them admission into the asylum. For the women, there were clear costs, as well as benefits, in entering the asylum. While their material needs would be met, they also had to submit to a rigid set of rules. These codes suggest that the word "asylum" was quite appropriate, for the institution was meant to struc-

ture the women's lives, much as the prison of the early republic structured the lives of its inmates.²² Magdalens were expected to give up communication with those outside its walls. Communication within was to be limited to "sober chaste conversation." No talk about their "past conditions" was permitted.²³ Additional rules included required attendance at morning and evening scripture readings, application at labor in the intervening hours, and the wearing of uniform clothing.²⁴ Although such rules discouraged many from seeking the assistance of the Magdalen Society, small numbers of women did make application, averaging about ten a year during its first decade of operation.²⁵

The entry narratives do not reveal to what degree the life history of each woman was reshaped in order to meet the conventional seduction narrative. Nevertheless, the constant recourse to the language of seduction fiction, often in the face of tremendous countervailing evidence, suggests that the stock figures and plot devices of these tales exerted great influence. An excerpt from one of the first entries, that for "Magdalen No. 7," provides an example:

Nineteen years of age, this young woman a few months past lived in the country, where (as she informs) she was seduced by a young man, who left her and came to this city; to which place she also followed in pursuit of him, but not being able to find him and ashamed after the loss she has sustained to return to her friends, she went into a disorderly House . . .²⁶

While terse, these notes contain several of the basic elements of the conventional seduction narrative. The central characters, the seduced young woman and the mobile young rake, are both portrayed. The geographic setting is also highly conventional. The young man's escape to the anonymous city displays the oft-expressed fears of the independence granted to male youth in the early republic. As in seduction fiction, bourgeois standards of female propriety are also invoked. The young woman feels too much shame to return to her former abode and thus is driven into a disorderly house in the city.

How closely this reconstructed story conforms to the particular experiences of this young woman is uncertain. As the parenthetical, "as she informs" betrays, she may have understood the benefits of retelling her story in a way consistent with the frame of reference of the Society managers. Subsequent notes reveal that she had only approached them after having contracted a disease that compelled her to go to the Alms House for aid. She could only gain admittance to the Magdalen asylum, a preferable location, after she had proven "sensible of her transgressions, attentive to religious instruction and desirous to receive the benefits of our Charity and advice."²⁷ This young woman may indeed have been engaging in some role playing.

The entry narrative for "Magdalen No. 15" provides another example of heavy reliance on seduction fiction. A seventeen-year old woman, brought up in the state of New York, also ended up as the victim of male artifice:

About 12 mos. ago (as she informs) she left her father's House, with a young man who had for some time visited in the family, and gained her affections, who having despoiled her of her chastity (and his proposal of marriage being disapproved of by her parents), prevailed with her to elope with him under promise of marriage to Phila., where he took lodgings and remained with her but a few weeks, and then left her pregnant and diseased; without friends or any means of support . . . ²⁸

Much like Magdalen No. 5, this young woman appears to be the victim of a young man's seductive wiles. The city again provides the proper context to allow abandonment. A notable addition here is the role of elopement. As in much contemporary seduction fiction, the choice to follow one's heart, without parental consent, ends in disaster. Once again, the notes suggest the negotiation of the young woman's narrative. One can hear her attempt to tell her story in a way consistent with the expectations of the managers, who noted that she: "uniformly expressed and evidenced her sorrow for having in an unguarded time, suffered herself to be betrayed and led astray."²⁹

Some of the entry narratives even seem to move beyond basic formula and into the smaller details of popular fiction. The story-line of the most popular of American tales, *Charlotte Temple*, can be heard in some entries. For example, "Magdalen No. 17," a woman of "respectable parents" born in Holland, related a tale with important parallels to that of Charlotte. Like Miss Temple, this young woman found herself transported across the sea by her seducer under an "expectation of being Married." Once in America, she discovered that this man already has a wife. Thus she was "left in a strange Country, without friends or a sufficiency to support her."³⁰ In this unfortunate discovery, one hears Charlotte's lament: "do you think he can be such a villain as to marry another woman, and leave me to die with want and misery in a strange land(?)"³¹

Echoes of *Charlotte Temple* also resound in the entry narrative of "Magdalen No. 11." In the tale of this twenty-one year old woman, born in Delaware and brought to Philadelphia, one can find a striking resemblance to Rowson's *Mademoiselle La Rue*. The older woman entrusted with the care of this young female proved, as had La Rue to Charlotte, an unworthy guardian indeed. As La Rue practically prostituted Charlotte to Montraville (receiving five guineas for providing access to her), this anonymous woman exposed her younger charge to the dangers posed by a libertine. Keeping company with an immoral man till late at night, she seemingly encouraged the rake to return after she

had retired. Much like La Rue, this older woman had little sympathy for the young female, not responding to her calls for help: "she called for assistance but without effect, though verily believes the Woman of the House heard her." Not receiving any response, she was unable to "resist the rude attack," and thus was "compelled to submit to his base designs." The older woman commissioned the apparent rape of the younger for she received "no other redress than being laughed at, and told that a disease was communicated to her."³² The exact character of the transaction seems complicated by the young woman's relation that the man spent most of the rest of the night "tarrying with her." The contemptuous response of the older woman who kept company with rakish men to the plight of the young female is reminiscent of La Rue in *Charlotte Temple* who Susanna Rowson describes as willing to "spare no pains to bring down innocence and beauty to the shocking level with herself." This willful corruption of the innocent proceeded from "that diabolical spirit of envy, which repines at seeing another in the full possession of that respect and esteem which she can no longer hope to enjoy."³³

The managers of the Society seem to have fully agreed with the author of *Charlotte Temple* about what was best for the seduced young woman. Believing that the rejection by friends and family that followed a seducer's abandonment prevented many young women from returning to a respectable life, Rowson suggested that what such women really needed was an uplifting hand from a friend. "Believe me," she urged, "many an unfortunate female, who has once strayed into the thorny paths of vice, would gladly return to virtue," if only someone would "endeavor to raise and reassure her."³⁴ The Society's founders stated that this was precisely their intention. In their Constitution, they defined their goal as restoring "to the paths of virtue" those seduced young women who were "affected with remorse at the misery of their situation," who were "desirous of returning to a life or rectitude, if they clearly saw an opening thereto."³⁵

If the Society managers were prone to understanding their clients' past in terms of the seduction narrative, at times life undoubtedly imitated art. Writers of late eighteenth century seduction fiction grounded their tales in real social problems. Yet their didactic intent often drove them to overdramatize the costs of illicit sex. For example, by having friends and family forsake a victimized young woman, popular writers tried to encourage chastity. Yet the Magdalen Society managers saw ample evidence that abandonment was quite real for some women. Whether families were unwilling to care for their straying daughters because of their offended sense of propriety or because of economic limitations, the record does not show. Whatever the cause for the abandonment of these women, the managers chose to see them as moral outcasts from the society of friends and family. The managers aimed to remove young women from the scorn of uncharitable relatives and acquaintances, hoping

that in many cases their help would lead to reconciliation.³⁶ For example, "Magdalen No. 10," a daughter of "reputable parents" who was "feeling the loss of her relatives" appealed to the managers to "reconcile them to her." When their attempts proved "fruitless" she was admitted into the asylum.³⁷ In this case, the managers found their belief confirmed that many prostitutes wanted "to reform, repent, and be redeemed from their wicked course; but are discouraged from an apprehension, none who are virtuous will regard or have pity on them."³⁸ Overall, then, the managers of the Magdalen Society discovered cases that matched in some measure the popular seduction narrative which informed their efforts.

But they also faced more challenging cases. One of their earliest entries, that for "Magdalen No. 6," admitted in January of 1808, stands out for its severe judgment of the young woman. The managers wrote: "this poor unhappy young woman by her depraved propensities, and wicked life of debauchery and idleness, was lately reduced to such a state of misery and distress . . . as to afford but little hopes of her recovery." When she applied for admission she "seemed much to lament the wicked life she had lived" and expressed an "earnest desire" to receive their aid. Thus the managers granted her entry. The end of the entry reveals that this woman had already fled the asylum, proving that "her heart" was "deceitful and desperately wicked," and that she had been "urged on by the grand tempter to pursue her evil propensities." Most likely, the woman had either obtained what she needed from her stay, or else she grew dissatisfied with the restrictions at the asylum. The managers seemed genuinely surprised that they were misled by her promises of penitence. Thus they also added that her "elopement" may have also stemmed from a "partial derangement of intellect."³⁹

The entry narrative for "Magdalen No. 6" stands out for its harsh tone. It is best understood as a reaction to this woman's flight from the asylum. Generally narratives were entered before any such event had occurred. The clash between the assumptions of the Society managers and the factual lives of the women they admitted was usually more subtle. In fact, many of the entry narratives contain a strange hybrid of seemingly contradictory material. Instead of finding seduced young women in need of rescue, the managers often found career prostitutes who were down on their luck and needed some material aid or a respite from their worldly cares. Yet even in the face of such contradictory evidence, the managers made constant recourse to the conventions of seduction fiction. "Magdalen No. 14" must have perplexed some managers. Relatively old at twenty-six years of age, this Irish-born woman had already been married. After losing her husband seven months into their marriage, she had moved into a boarding house where she had subsequently spent six years "abandoning herself to debauchery." Only after she had been taken up "as a Vagrant and Committed to Prison" did she see cause to offer "profes-

sions of Penitence" and display a "determination to depart from her evil course of life." Nonetheless, perhaps because she had been conducting herself "with propriety," the managers did not see her move to the "Boarding House" (likely to have been a bawdy house) as an economic choice to enter the profession of prostitution. Instead, she only became a prostitute after "she was seduced" at this residence.⁴⁰

If a young woman spending six years in prostitution seemed to defy the standard seduction story (according to popular fiction one would have expected her to have perished in shame or committed suicide by this point), the choice of one woman to practice prostitution while also living with a man must have been even more surprising and disturbing. "Magdalen No. 16" lived as if married with a man for four years. She was twice pregnant, having "miscarried of two Children," and still persisted "in habits of prostitution." If her story contradicted many of their assumptions, the managers still tried to fit it into the conventional narrative, perhaps with the help of this woman who presently was in "considerable distress," and who once admitted "conducted [herself] well." The downfall of this woman, who had "respectable parents," they attributed to her being "seduced at the age of 15 years." Her seducer, with whom she then lived for four years, had, according to her entry narrative, used a frequent tactic of seducers: he "had visited at her fathers House under pretense of Marriage."⁴¹

If career prostitutes challenged the notions of the Society managers, mistresses must have appeared equally surprising. The checkered past of "Magdalen No. 28" must have encouraged the managers to rethink some of their assumptions. This woman, who had grown up in Mount Holly and later moved to Philadelphia, joined a Spanish man on a journey to Savannah, Georgia where they lived together until he perished from yellow fever. She then moved back to Philadelphia. There she found a man who supported her until he "became so sensible of the impropriety of his Conduct that he separated from her," leaving her with a "sum of money" and some advice for her to subsequently lead "an orderly Chaste life." Then the money started to dwindle: "a considerable part of the money she had received as a reward for her iniquity being expended, she became alarmed, least in a short time she should be reduced to poverty and want." Given "these apprehensions she called upon one of the Managers for advice and assistance." While this woman may have couched her appeal in terms consistent with the assumptions of the managers, suggesting that she was afraid that economic need might cause her to "be tempted again to a life of Infamy," the managers must have recognized that she had spent many years in such "Infamy" and thus was probably telling them what they wanted to hear. If their doubts were raised, the managers still wrote that they believed "the Sincerity of her professions," and were willing to describe her as having been initially "Seduced by a Spaniard," and then later "again led astray by a person of property."⁴²

"Magdalen No. 20" presented similar contradictions to the standard seduction narrative. She was kept in a boarding house by a "person of Considerable note in this City," even bearing him a child. After having lived in ill-repute for ten years she found herself "cast off by the person who had placed her to board" and therefore left in a "destitute situation." Facing poverty, she sought the Society's aid.⁴³ This woman not only challenged the managers' preconceptions before her entry, like many other women admitted, she challenged their views of virtuous womanhood with her conduct once inside. It took less than a month to discover that she could not be reformed: "Magdalen No. 20 notwithstanding her fair professions at and for some short time after her admission, became so ungovernable in her temper, and indecent in her behavior that complaint thereof was made to the Managers visiting." Despite the managers' admonitions that she be "more circumspect," their efforts proved "unavailing," leading them to expel her from the asylum.⁴⁴ Her experience was far from unique. Not only were many women expelled, others chose to leave without the required prior consultation: so-called "elopement" from the asylum, meaning simply leave without permission, was a persistent problem.⁴⁵

The managers' views were challenged not only by many of the women who sought their aid; even more inscrutable were those who did not. The Society expressed great dismay at the relatively few women who sought care. While they never aimed to wipe out prostitution entirely, the managers were genuinely surprised at the indifference of most prostitutes to their venture. Six months after opening their asylum, only four women had willingly entered it. The managers responded aggressively to this reluctance: "It is lamentable to observe the Insensibility that generally prevails among these deluded females, and their backwardness to accept the charitable assistance gratuitously offered to them." The managers believed they had taken "considerable pains" to spread the word about their institution, but that this "wretched class of females" seemed unwilling to part with their "evil habits." While taken aback, they still tried to maintain some hope, suggesting "it is probable our family will increase."⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the Magdalen Society attracted a tiny portion of the city's prostitutes to their asylum throughout its years of operation.⁴⁷ Historian Marcia Roberta Carlisle has estimated that between 1821 and 1836, the managers admitted only about thirty women a year. With frequent expulsions and flights, on average about one-third of the population each year, the number living together was considerably smaller, usually about eleven or twelve Magdalens at any one time.⁴⁸ While no systematic demography of Philadelphia prostitution for this period is available, New York City is a useful measure. In the 1830's, a period in which New York's population was just beginning to eclipse that of Philadelphia, historian Timothy Gilfoyle places the number of prostitutes in New York somewhere between 1,850 and 3,700.⁴⁹ Contemporary accounts of Philadelphia prostitution leave one no reason to believe that this

city had any smaller a sex trade than New York.⁵⁰ The great disparity between the number of prostitutes practicing in Philadelphia and those seeking admission into the asylum was readily perceived and greatly lamented by the operators of the Society. In the decades approaching mid-century, the managers repeatedly expressed such regret in terms similar to that of their annual report for 1834: "Yet we cannot but lament and wonder, that of the many unchaste females in a population so great as ours, comparatively so few are found in the only Asylum opened to those who wish to renounce their infamy."⁵¹

Faced with indifference from without and challenges to their assumptions from within, the Society managers only slowly changed their understanding of prostitution. Initially, they mostly ignored contrary information. By 1811 the entry narratives started to become increasingly spare. The women's histories were reduced to a few simple facts: place of birth, length of time since they entered the city, and an indication of when they had been "seduced." Perhaps another symbol of the managers' decision to withdraw their institution further from the difficulties of the outside world was their construction of a fence around the asylum in that same year.⁵² The past experience of the Magdalens continued to be ignored in the ensuing decades: from 1820 forward, no admission information at all was being included in the minutes. By 1845 the managers could frankly admit that such neglect was regular policy: "the Managers have not deemed it part of their duty to inquire into the history of those who voluntarily embrace this quiet home."⁵³

Another manner in which the Society could try to ignore the conflicting information that prostitutes presented was to concentrate more on those women whose experience closely fit the conventional seduction narrative. Specifically, the managers expressed a preference for younger prostitutes who they imagined had more recently been seduced, rather than those veterans whose "hearts have become hardened."⁵⁴ This preference for the young would finally be institutionalized in the early twentieth century when the Magdalen Society became the White-Williams Foundation, an institution performing preventative work with school children. Perhaps profiting from the early experience of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society, the House of Refuge established in New York in 1825 aimed at working with young prostitutes rather than those "more advanced in years" who threatened to "exercise a corrupting influence."⁵⁵ Even with such evasions, however, the challenges that prostitutes presented could never be completely denied. Ejections, elopements, and disorderly behavior were persistent features of life at the Magdalen asylum. For example, in 1817, after a special committee investigation, four women were dismissed because they had been secretly leaving at night. A fifth eloped soon after their ejection.⁵⁶

While the women's narratives disappeared from the minutes of the Society, the rhetoric of the conventional seduction narrative persisted in its annual

reports. Occasionally, an ideal inmate was showcased to support such rhetoric.⁵⁷ The annual report from 1820 demonstrates the persistence of the language of seduction fiction, suggesting young women were “ensnared by artful persons, and robbed of their innocence.”⁵⁸ Yet this same annual report betrayed the growing disillusionment of the Society managers. If some women could blame their downfall on the seduction schemes of base young men, others could only look to their own bad habits. Having an especially poor year in keeping women in the asylum, with nine of twenty-two leaving without permission, the managers blamed “the effects of an attachment to intoxicating liquors,” as well as a “general hardness of the heart consequent upon a depraved course of life.”⁵⁹

This report was a harbinger of things to come. Over the next three decades, the Society’s reports continued to blame the young women themselves. Blaming prostitution on women’s alcohol use became conventional.⁶⁰ For example, the annual report for 1837 clearly asserts this position: “Perhaps the greatest cause of the unchastity of females in our City is to be found in the profuse use of spirituous liquors.”⁶¹ Other comments also betray an increasing perception of a class-based cultural division between the reformers and their subjects. The report from 1845 concentrated on urban amusements, suggesting that many women who entered the asylum “have to date their downfall, it is believed, in great measure to that source of crime, the ballroom; where many meet in the pursuit of pleasure, but the end whereof, is pain and sorrow.”⁶² Prostitutes seemed to be increasingly enmeshed in a self-reinforcing, class-based web of sin. The reports’ condemnations closely mirror criticisms made by middle-class reformers of the working class working in a variety of circumstances. The managers not only complained about alcoholism and dance halls, but also ostentatious dress, theater attendance, idleness, and neglectful parenting.⁶³ The asylum would differ in every respect from the women’s former haunts: “when we contrast the scenes of revelry and noisy mirth so recently left, with the order and quiet of their new abode, it must be apparent that the change is very great.”⁶⁴

By playing on class tensions, the managers could help preserve their sense of respectable bourgeois womanhood, even while placing more blame on the women under their charge. Thus with complete propriety they asked for the assistance of proper women to enter “the abodes of poverty and wretchedness” to seek out potential Magdalens. They recommended that “the virtuous, whose character and standing in society is above suspicion” should “search them out, and tell them of the guilt and wretchedness of their course.”⁶⁵ Bourgeois women might also correct the depraved propensities of their lower-class sisters by having a “more watchful oversight” over the “humbler members of the household.” Thus the annual report for 1849 called on mistresses to offer “kind reproof where vicious inclinations are suspected” in their servants.⁶⁶

The Society's new regulations for the asylum expressed increasing suspicion of the young women held there. It further resembled the penitentiaries being constructed across the country, most famously, Eastern State, being built less than half a mile north of the Magdalen asylum. Restriction of the Magdalens increased as the managers feared that unrepentant prostitutes might seduce their charges back into the trade. In 1826, the managers sought to "classify the objects of care" by calling for extra rooms which would allow them to discover "the sincerity of the Magdalens admitted, previous to their entering the apartments of those who give hopeful evidence of a settled determination to reform." The Society elaborated its reasoning: "We fear that sometimes a settled and deep design to entice away Magdalens in the house, has excited some abandoned women to enter the asylum."⁶⁷ Five years later the Society added another building and carried out its plan of classification.⁶⁸ It appears to have continued with these restrictive tendencies; approaching mid-century, the managers felt they could compare their institution favorably to "*Penitentiaries, Houses of Correction, and Female Refuges*," in their efforts at "breaking up vicious habits" through "wholesome restraint and discipline" which would produce "habits of self-denial and obedience in principle."⁶⁹ The managers also contemplated a more coercive stance towards those prostitutes who failed to enter the doors of their asylum. In their annual report for 1847, they related that they had appointed a special committee to consider "whether any additional means of filling the Asylum ought to be resorted to." They took only tentative steps in this direction because they feared that "some sinister purpose" might guide the conduct of forcibly entered Magdalens.⁷⁰

Growing distrust towards prostitutes probably reached its logical extreme in the assertion that prostitutes could become the seducers of young men. In a complete inversion of the initial discourse of the Society's founders, the managers' report of 1846 justified their work with prostitutes not as a means to save vulnerable young women, but as a means to help young men whom prostitutes placed at risk. Suggesting that "the evils inflicted upon society in various ways by this class of the community are incalculable," the managers especially feared the damage caused to vulnerable young men by prostitutes: "How many a young man for whose future portion, usefulness, respectability and the esteem of the good, were reasonably anticipated, has been lured to destruction by her whose 'Feet take hold on death.'"⁷¹

In the decades approaching mid-century the Society expressed an increasing hostility towards prostitutes. However, the conventional seduction motif did not disappear. In fact, it could sometimes assume a heightened fervor when ignited by the flames of religious fervor. Evangelical influences are much in evidence in the Society's annual reports of this period. Evangelism encouraged negative judgments on the perceived drinking habits of prostitutes, yet it also encouraged strong condemnations of male seducers. If a decidedly lesser

theme in the decades approaching mid-century, the plot-line of seduction fiction continued to be present, often appearing next to (and in open contradiction of) rhetoric which attacked prostitutes.⁷² The annual report for 1851 contains a rare attempt to resolve the seeming contradictions of these two discourses that had been coexisting for many years. It began by condemning the “fell destroyer” who attacked the virtue of the young woman, using such strategies as a false “solemn promise of marriage.” Once this crime was committed, however, “the unhappy victim of deceit” herself “in turn, becomes the seducer, and tempter of the inexperienced.”⁷³

Thus by mid-century the Magdalen Society was projecting two images of the prostitute: most frequently, that of the seducer, but also occasionally, that of the seduced. In both portrayals, the focus was primarily on the depraved character of the individual, whether rakish male or drunken, seductive prostitute. While by mid-century class antagonisms became quite noticeable in the rhetoric of the Society, considerations of economic distress or class exploitation as potential explanations for the presence of prostitution are largely absent.⁷⁴ To the managers of the society, economic status was determined by an individual’s habits and way of life. The economic degradation suffered by prostitutes was their own fault.⁷⁵

The conflicted discourse of the Magdalen Society mirrored a larger dialogue surrounding prostitution in mid-nineteenth century America. Images of the prostitute as both the seduced and the seducer appear in mid-century fiction, and didactic literature.⁷⁶ The New York Female Moral Reform Society, made famous by the work of historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, although more militant in its rhetoric and innovative in its policy, was simply one group within a wide range of participants engaged in a dialogue about prostitution.⁷⁷ Considering that the motif of the fall from seduction into prostitution had been explored in American publications for nearly a half-century before *The Advocate of Moral Reform* deployed it, the New York Female Moral Reform Society was fighting an embattled position, not staking new ground, in their publication. Fiction writers continued to explore the topic of female betrayal. For example, George Foster in his 1850 publication *New York By Gas Light* typically explained prostitution as often caused by “man’s individual villainy in seducing the pure being who trusts her destiny to his keeping.”⁷⁸ Closer to home and possessing a subversive class protest was George Lippard’s *Quaker City* that upbraided Philadelphia’s leading men for their sexual predations.⁷⁹

Perhaps the most heated contest over seduction at mid-century was the Helen Jewett case in New York. When the well-to-do young clerk Richard Robinson murdered the popular prostitute Helen Jewett, the ensuing trial gave heated expression to both views of the prostitute.⁸⁰ In the debate surrounding Jewett’s death, and in popular representations of prostitution more generally, the prostitute often emerged as the potential seducer of young men.

Joseph Holt Ingraham's 1843 book based on the Jewett case, *Frank Rivers*, echoed the judgments of many of his contemporaries. He suggested that prostitutes, and not young men were more dangerous: "she was the seducer, not he. . . . Her beauty was her power, and she triumphed in it. She felt a sort of revenge against the other sex, and used every art to tempt and ruin young men."⁸¹

Thus not only in the records of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society, but in a broader popular culture context, two opposing images of the prostitute were simultaneously propagated by mid-century: the seductive temptress, and the more traditional portrait, ultimately deriving from sensibility literature, the innocent victim. If the experience of the Magdalen Society is representative, it appears that the emergent picture of the prostitute as villain may have resulted from a growing sense of frustration with a class of women who seemed increasingly culturally distant and distinct. Rapid urban growth, booming foreign immigration, and increasing class segregation were certainly key elements in this estrangement. Yet equally important were the unrealistic expectations of bourgeois Americans. Considering the preconceptions of both the Society and an American reading public whose image of the prostitute was highly informed by seduction fiction, their frustration is not surprising. Expecting to find victimized young innocents, they instead often found worldly women who seemed indifferent to reformers' standards of bourgeois propriety. Writers seem to have fitfully veered between the two images of the prostitute, neither proving fully satisfying. Ultimately, few seemed able to transcend descriptions of gendered character, one class-specific—the prostitute as depraved lower-class harlot, the other not—the prostitute as innocent victim of male depravity, in explaining the presence of prostitution in the antebellum city.⁸²

Having explored the fate of the seduction narrative in antebellum America through the window of the Magdalen Society, we may now tentatively answer the question posed at the beginning of this essay: How was the seduction narrative reconfigured? If the seduction narrative less often could explain prostitution, it still seems to have resonated with many mid-century bourgeois Americans. To the degree that it made sense to them, one of its primary functions was to uphold the image of the fundamental purity of bourgeois womanhood. Yet the image of the depraved male encoded in the traditional seduction narrative had also been rejected in some measure. By mid-century bourgeois males were being urged to respect women by adopting a standard of chastity. As William Alcott urged his readers, men were expected to "protect and aid," not "injure" the innocence of women. But bourgeois males were participating in the thriving practice of urban prostitution of this period. To the degree that they resolved the tension between these conflicting codes (whether on an individual or collective level), the line of class may have appeared a useful dividing point. If working-class women seemed immersed in a

vice-ridden world, the rules of the bourgeois parlor were inapplicable to them. While the writings of bourgeois reformers certainly never recommended the visitation of prostitutes, one can imagine that their works may have influenced their class peers in just such a direction. By portraying prostitutes as depraved and beyond hope, moral reformers may have encouraged their class peers to question whether such women truly deserved the respect demanded for proper ladies. The prostitute was simultaneously alien and available to mid-century bourgeois men.

Notes

I would like to thank William W. Cutler, Margaret Marsh, and P.M.G. Harris for their helpful comments on an early draft of this essay. The MCEAS seminar provided many helpful suggestions; I would especially like to thank C. Dallett Hemphill and Bruce Dorsey for their insights. Finally, I wish to express gratitude to Richard Dunn for his editorial guidance in seeing this essay to completion, and to Norah C. Feeny for her assistance all along.

1. William Alcott, *The Young Man's Guide*, 15th edition (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1843; 1st edition, 1833), 306-8.

2. Rodney Hessinger, "'Insidious Murderers of Female Innocence': Representations of Masculinity in the Seduction Tales of the Late Eighteenth Century," in Merrill Smith, ed. *Sex and Sexuality in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 262-282. For other readings of the popular seduction tale that also tie these tales to social difficulties with the sexual behavior of late eighteenth century Americans, see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Clare Lyons, "Sex Among the 'Rabble': Gender Transitions in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1750-1830," Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1996. For readings of these tales that stress the ideological context of the revolutionary era, see Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3:44 (1987): 689-721, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating 'Virtue': Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America," in Elaine Scarry, ed. *Literature and the Body* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 160-184.

3. A number of works have considered the development of a code of bourgeois male sexual propriety. For a synthetic overview of such scholarship, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), esp. chapter 4. Most works have treated this ethic of male chastity as largely the concern of a fringe of mid-century sex reformers; for a recent convincing demonstration of the centrality of male chastity to the antebellum bourgeois mentality, see Dallett Hemphill, "Ladies First," ch. 9 of her *Bowing to Necessities: The History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford Uni-

versity Press, forthcoming).

4. An incredible amount of ink has been spilled on the topic of the centrality of female chastity to antebellum bourgeois ideology. Two of the most important and convincing statements of this position are Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4 (Winter 1978): 19-36.

5. Mary Ryan and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg have both indirectly demonstrated the participation of male bourgeois youth in urban prostitution in their depictions of middle-class women retrieving errant sons from brothel visiting. Timothy Gilfoyle most clearly demonstrates the participation of bourgeois youth in a sporting culture centered around prostitution. He also suggests that working class men shared in this sporting culture. See Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 116-130, Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," in *Disorderly Conduct* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 109-128, and Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 92-116.

6. Christine Stansell pursues the theme of a class-based view of womanhood with respect to the ideology of domesticity, suggesting bourgeois home-visiting reformers were disturbed by the boisterous community life of working class women. Stansell also suggests that young working-class women seemed to reject bourgeois sexual standards by adopting flashy clothing styles which accentuated sexual appeal. See Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), chs. 4, 5.

7. In the diary of a late nineteenth-century young bourgeois man, E. Anthony Rotundo has discovered a clearly articulated sexual code which demanded chaste conduct with class peers, but allowed sexual indulgence with "chippies," women of the lower class. While no such document has been discovered for an earlier period, there is ample evidence that within mid-nineteenth century bourgeois society, males had adopted a standard of male sexual propriety, and yet simultaneously fre-

quented prostitutes. See Rotundo's *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 119-128.

8. *Magdalen Society Constitution*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (hereafter HSP).

9. On the status of the founders and the managers of the Magdalen Society, see Carlisle, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers," 155-162. On the readership of seduction fiction, see Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 11-125.

10. *Poulson's* (Philadelphia), Jan. 23, 1801.

11. Bruce Dorsey demonstrates this shared outlook of Philadelphia's reform community prior to 1820. See his "City of Brotherly Love: Religious Benevolence, Gender, and Reform in Philadelphia, 1780-1844," Ph.D. thesis, Brown University, 1993, esp. 83-6. By emphasizing the link between poverty and prostitution, Clare Lyons ignores the plot progression of seduction narratives. Seduction preceded poverty in such tales. As subsequent discussion shall demonstrate, the linking of class concerns and prostitution did not truly emerge until the middle decades of the century for the Society managers. See Lyons, "Sex Among the 'Rabble,'" 369-406. The problem of poverty encouraging a resort to prostitution at least appeared in some, if constrained, form; the more convention-defying notion that some women were attracted to prostitution because it proved a lucrative occupation was given no consideration at all. For a consideration of the economic opportunities and independence that prostitution offered to early nineteenth century Philadelphia women, see Marcia Roberta Carlisle, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," Ph.D. thesis, Rutgers University, 1982; for the same view of New York's prostitutes, see Stansell, *City of Women*, ch. 9.

12. Cf. Minutes of the Board of Managers, 12/7/07 (Vol. 1, 87-8); Minutes, 3/7/08 (Vol. 1, 98-9); Minutes, 2/7/09 (Vol. 1, 131), Philadelphia Magdalen Society (hereafter PMS), HSP.

13. *Poulson's* (Philadelphia), Jan. 23, 1801.

14. For an insightful account of the crucial role which sensibility literature played in the founding and promotion of the Magdalen Hospital in London, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 5.

15. Hessinger, "Insidious Murderers of Female Innocence," 262-282.

16. *Poulson's*, Jan. 23, 1801.

17. Minutes, 7/20/07 (Vol. 1, 83) PMS, HSP.

18. Cf. Minutes, 1/15/05 (Vol. 1, 38); Minutes, 2/11/05 (Vol. 1, 41); Minutes, 4/25/05 (Vol. 1, 46), PMS, HSP.

19. Annual admittance figures are contained in the Society's Annual Reports, HSP. For some statistical summaries of this information, see Carlisle, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers," 168, 175, 187, and Lyons, "Sex Among the 'Rabble,'" 393, 395.

20. Primary care of the Magdalens was given to a matron hired by the Society, while the managers would regularly visit the asylum to ensure that operations were progressing smoothly. Giving daily care to the matron might have resolved some of the obvious ideological tensions inherent in a male-led institution geared to helping fallen women who, according to the writings of the Society, had reached their depraved state because of the seductive schemes of men. Another attempt to resolve these obvious tensions may have been the Society's rule that no board member could visit a Magdalen unattended: "No member of the board shall hold any private conversation with any of the Magdalens, nor visit any of their apartments alone." In all visits board members had to be joined by either the steward, matron, her assistant, or a fellow board member. See Minutes 7/20/07 (Vol. 1, 79b-80); Minutes 11/7/09 (Vol. 1, 160), PMS, HSP.

21. Clare Lyons has noted that the entry narratives seemed to mimic popular print. The more extended analysis of the narratives in the pages that follow will more firmly establish this connection. In addition, I wish to suggest several lessons beyond the narratives' similarity to popular print. First, I aim to demonstrate that these narratives were not simply imposed; rather, they were negotiated. Women seeking entry to the asylum recognized that playing the role of the seduced woman brought them sympathy and material benefits. Second, I wish to expose the long-term dynamics of this negotiation. Gradually, the seduction narrative was eroded. In its place emerged a less sympathetic and more class-bound critique of the women who entered the asylum. See Lyons, "Sex Among the 'Rabble,'" 403-5.

22. On the fundamental similarity of asylums

and prisons in the early republic, see David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971). For an in-depth consideration of how the policies of the Magdalen Society resembled those of Philadelphia penal institutions, see Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp., 272-9, 287-8.

23. Minutes, 7/20/07 (Vol. 1, 79b); Minutes, 11/7/09 (Vol. 1, 161), PMS, HSP.

24. Minutes, 7/20/07 (Vol. 1, 80); Minutes, 3/7/08 (Vol. 1, 102), PMS, HSP.

25. Carlisle, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers," 168; Lyons, "Sex Among the 'Rabble,'" 393, 395.

26. Minutes, 2/2/08 (Vol. 1, 91-2), PMS, HSP.

27. *Ibid.*, 91-2.

28. Minutes, 12/6/08 (Vol. 1, 126), PMS, HSP.

29. *Ibid.*, 127.

30. Minutes, 2/7/09 (Vol. 1, 131), PMS, HSP.

31. Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth*, ed. Ann Douglas (New York: Penguin Books, 1991; 1st American edition, 1794), 106.

32. Minutes, 3/7/08 (Vol. 1, 99-100), PMS, HSP.

33. Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 30.

34. Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 70.

35. Magdalen Society Constitution, HSP.

36. Minutes, 2/1/04 (Vol. 1, 30); Minutes 4/25/05 (Vol. 1, 43); Minutes 3/4/06 (Vol. 1, 54); Minutes 2/9/07 (Vol. 1, 69); Minutes 3/7/08 (Vol. 1, 99); Minutes 5/3/08 (Vol. 1, 108) PMS, HSP; Annual Report 1819, 3; Annual Report 1824, 3, HSP.

37. Minutes, 3/7/08 (Vol. 1, 98-9), PMS, HSP.

38. Minutes, 3/4/06 (Vol. 1, 54), PMS, HSP.

39. Minutes, 1/11/08 (Volume 1, 89-90), PMS, HSP.

40. Minutes, 9/6/08 (Vol. 1, 130), PMS, HSP.

For similar cases of career prostitutes see the notes for "Magdalen No. 12," Minutes, 5/3/08 (Vol. 1, 109); "Magdalen No. 25," Minutes, 12/6/09 (Vol. 1, 167); "Magdalen No. 27," Minutes, 5/1/10 (Volume 2, 13), PMS, HSP.

41. Minutes, 2/7/09 (Vol. 1, 131), PMS, HSP.

42. Minutes, 7/3/10 (Vol. 2, 13), PMS, HSP.

43. Minutes 8/1/09 (Vol. 1, 152), PMS, HSP.

44. Minutes, 9/5/09 (Vol. 1, 152-3), PMS, HSP.

45. The term elopement was likely borrowed from seduction fiction. For popular writers elopement marked a critical moment when parental counsel in courtship had fatefully been abandoned. For a full discussion of the frequent expulsions and elopements of women at the Magdalen Society, see Marcia Roberta Carlisle, "Prostitutes and their Reformers in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia," ch. 6. Carlisle discovered that for the period between 1821 and 1836, about one-third of all women admitted quickly fled or were discharged for insubordination.

46. Minutes, 2/2/08 (Vol. 1, 92-4), PMS, HSP.

47. For comparisons between the number of prostitutes practicing in Philadelphia and number of women who entered the asylum in its early years, see, Lyons, "Sex Among the 'Rabble,'" 401-2.

48. Carlisle, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers," 175.

49. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 58-9, 344. On the comparable size of New York and Philadelphia in this period, see Edwin Wolf, 2nd "The Origins of Philadelphia's Self-Depreciation, 1820-1920," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 1 (January 1980): 58-73, esp. 58.

50. Particularly useful are the impressions of George G. Foster who wrote about the underworld of both Philadelphia and New York. See his 1848 writings "Philadelphia in Slices," ed. George Rogers Taylor, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no. 1 (January 1969), 23-72, esp. 38-42.

51. Annual Report 1834, 6-7, HSP. See also, Annual Report 1829, 5-6; Annual Report 1831, 5; Annual Report 1835, 5; Annual Report 1839, 5; Annual Report 1847, 4, HSP.

52. Minutes 2/15/11 (Vol. 2, 3), PMS, HSP.

53. Annual Report 1845, 4, HSP.

54. Quoted Annual Report 1836, 7, HSP. For further examples of such a preference and attempts to encourage such a population, see Minutes, 7/6/13 (Vol. 2, 90), PMS; Annual Report 1820, 3; Annual Report 1843, 3-4; Annual Report 1848, 7-8; Annual Report 1849, 11-13; White-Williams Foundation Manual Book 1, 2, HSP.

55. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 64-5.

56. Minutes, 9/12/17 (Vol. 2, 164), PMS, HSP.

57. Cf. Annual Report 1819, 2-3; Annual Report 1829, 4; Annual Report 1837, 4-5; Annual Report 1843, 3-4, HSP.

58. Annual Report, 1820, 3, HSP.
 59. Annual Report 1820, 3, HSP.
 60. Cf. Annual Report 1823, 2; Annual Report 1827, 7; Annual Report 1832, 6; Annual Report 1836, 4; Annual Report 1845, 5, HSP. On alcohol and class conflict see Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 145-53; The post-1820 tendency of the Magdalen Society to blame their charges for their own downfall was a trend shared by most Philadelphia charitable organizations. See, Bruce Dorsey, "City of Brotherly Love," 110-137.
 61. Annual Report 1837, 7, HSP.
 62. Annual Report 1845, 4, HSP.
 63. Cf. Annual Report 1842, 3-4; Annual Report 1845, 4, 6; Annual Report 1848, 3-5; Annual Report 1849, 11, HSP. The turn to parent-blaming, while marking a significant shift from the original seduction narrative, may have to a certain extent allowed some renewed faith in the original innocence of these women. The Society managers' growing concentration on class-based cultural differences was mirrored by similar developments in the thought of bourgeois Americans more generally. For one especially relevant account of the class values embedded in such condemnations, see Stansell, *City of Women*, esp. chs. 4, 8, 10.
 64. Annual Report 1841, 5, HSP.
 65. Annual Report 1834, 8; Annual Report 1835, 5, HSP.
 66. Annual Report, 1849, 14-15, HSP.
 67. Annual Report 1826, 8, HSP.
 68. Annual Report 1831, 5, HSP.
 69. Annual Report 1849, 6-7, HSP.
 70. The society decided against coercively entering prostitutes into their institution, but did hire someone to more actively recruit Magdalens. See Annual Report 1847, 5-6, HSP. Eventually, by the 1880s, the Magdalen Society did have court-ordered placements of young women in their asylum. See Carlisle, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers," 181-3.
 71. Annual Report 1846, 6, HSP.
 72. Cf. Annual Report 1827, 7; Annual Report 1829, 4; Annual Report 1832, 6-8; Annual Report 1834, 6-7; Annual Report 1840, 5; Annual Report 1844, 8; Annual Report 1845, 3; Annual Report 1850, 11-12, HSP.

Two explanations might be offered for the vestigial image of the seduced woman in the later publications of the Magdalen Society: the Society's lingering awareness of the founding ideology of their institutions and the practical consideration of attracting donations for seemingly worthy subjects. The major concern of this essay is with the highly noticeable shift to a negative portrait of the prostitute. The seduction narrative remained much more prominent in popular literature than within the writings of the Society. For a consideration of that persistence of the narrative, see the discussion below.

73. Annual Report 1851, 9-10, HSP.
 74. This is not to suggest economic causations were wholly absent from the thought of the Society, one can find occasional discussion of such problems. However, the Society failed to address such a perceived problem in any significant way—they instead were more interested in reforming the habits of their subjects; for one discussion of economic problems in relation to prostitution see Annual Report 1849, 11, 15, HSP.
 75. Paul Boyer, among others, has noted the tendency of antebellum reformers to understand class as a cultural category rather than as an economic structure. See his *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), chs. 1-4.
 76. On both of these opposing portrayals see, Adrienne Siegel, *The Image of the American City in Popular Literature* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1981), 38-40, 49, 87-8, 112-3, 170-1; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 97-8, 143-161; David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 361-5; Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1940), 320-1; and Ronald G. Waters, *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 50-1, 69-71. The theme of seduction was pursued in almost every form of printed material, ranging from salacious fiction to stern didactic essays.
 77. This characterization of their rhetoric differs from that of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg who asserts that the attack on male seducers in the New York Female Moral Reform Society's organ *The Advocate of Moral Reform* represented

a new attack on the double-standard. Where Smith-Rosenberg's characterization of the NYFMRS as proto-feminist is more convincing is in her description of Society members visiting brothels in order to expose male clients, and in the Society's employment policy of hiring only women. Such activities may have been more consistent with the implications of the seduction motif than the basic program of the Philadelphia society. One should note, however, that the NYFMRS also followed the lead of the Philadelphia Magdalen Society by establishing an asylum (which proved short-lived); see, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman, 109-128. On the class dynamics of Boston's New England Female Reform Society, see Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 49-76.

78. Quoted from Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 362. Where Foster was more atypical was in his assertion that another major cause of prostitution was in "the monstrous crime of society which dooms its daughters to degradation, want, and misery."

79. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 83-4. Also indicative of Philadelphians' conflicted discourse about seduction and prostitution during this period was the passage of an anti-seduction law in 1843. This law was inspired by popular petitions to the state legislature by citizens of Philadelphia. As passed, the law included a clause that seemed to restrict it in class terms. Men could only be prosecuted for seduction if the victimized woman was of "good repute." See Carlisle, "Prostitutes and their Reformers," 120.

80. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 92-99. The most comprehensive treatment of the Jewett case is Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

81. Quoted from Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 151.

82. Two notable departures from this pattern were Mathew Carey in Philadelphia and William Sanger in New York. Both stressed environmental factors such as poverty in explaining prostitution. See Roberts, "Prostitutes and Their Reformers," 56-8, and Stansell, *City of Women*, 176-7.