

Katie N. Johnson

***DAMAGED GOODS: SEX HYSTERIA AND THE PROSTITUTE
FATALE***

In 1913, the play characterized in the popular press as “unquestionably the most widely discussed play of a decade” was not a brilliant interpretation of a classic, one of Shaw’s problem plays, or one of David Belasco’s realist inventions. The production that took the country by storm, Eugène Brieux’s *Damaged Goods* (*Les Avariés*), was the first play on the American stage to deal openly with syphilis as a central theme.¹ Though celebrated at the time as “The Greatest Contribution Ever Made by the Stage to the Cause of Humanity,”² this forgotten play merits the modern scholar’s attention not only because its immense popularity has been overlooked or because it broke what turn-of-the-century narratives called the “conspiracy of silence.” Rather, this essay will argue that the performance history of *Damaged Goods*, far from marking a threshold-crossing freedom in sexual discourse in Progressive Era America, reveals how Progressives utilized the stage to normalize and reinforce the social centrality of bourgeois marriage, reproductivity, and traditional gender norms, much as they had wielded other discourses to study, contain, and discipline sexuality during previous decades.³ While this regulation of sexuality rested upon a conservative agenda that the ostensible liberalism of the play obfuscated in its (and even our) own day, the play’s portrayal of prostitution demonstrates a rather clear, though vexed, relationship between contagion and the dangers of unsanctioned sex.

From its very first private performance in March 1913, *Damaged Goods* managed to do what no sex play before it had. At a time when plays were regularly yanked off Broadway for containing sexual themes, this play was enthusiastically supported by public figures who saw it as promoting an important social cause.⁴ Significantly, after its premiere, *Damaged Goods* was given as a command performance for President Wilson, his cabinet, both houses of Congress, members of the United States Supreme Court, diplomats, and “the most distinguished audience ever assembled in America, including exclusively the foremost men and women of the Capital.”⁵ When it moved to New York City

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in April, *Damaged Goods* was likewise endorsed by leading medical scientists, legislators, clergy, suffragists, and reformers, including John D. Rockefeller Jr., chair of the Bureau of Social Hygiene and leader of many antiprostitution investigations, reformer Maude E. Miner, and New York City's mayor, William J. Gaynor.⁶ Though it captured the attention of the social elite, the play appealed across political and class lines, as this newspaper account noted: "Many of the most prominent people in the city were present, numbering representatives not only of sociological and medical interests, but members of society, leaders in the world of fashion, of the drama and of education, well known first nighters and not a few just plain people."⁷ The chief administrator of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company was so impressed with *Damaged Goods* that he offered, "if someone could be found who would treat the same subject properly in book form[,] his company would publish it and distribute it free to the Metropolitan's seven million subscribers."⁸ The *New York Evening Mail's* drama critic, Burns Mantle, emphatically judged *Damaged Goods* "the biggest, the most meaningful, the most vital, the most impressive and the most terribly true drama we have ever seen played."⁹ In short, while *Damaged Goods* had been banned from the legitimate stage in France and England, it received the ultimate stamp of legitimacy in the United States.¹⁰ What, precisely, fueled the unprecedented success of this VD play?

One answer would be that *Damaged Goods* represented a watershed moment in sex discourse, signaling a new level of public discussion about venereal disease, sexuality, and prostitution. Certainly, this was the prevailing view of the day. As the author of a 1913 *Current Opinion* article observed, "A wave of sex hysteria and sex discussion seems to have invaded this country. Our former reticence on matters of sex is giving way to a frankness that would even startle Paris. Prostitution . . . is the chief topic of polite conversation. It has struck 'sex o'clock' in America."¹¹ The American premiere of *Damaged Goods*, the article continued, marked the beginning of "an epoch of new freedom in sex discussion," challenging the boundaries of public sexual decorum and instigating what many perceived to be a flurry of public discourse on sex.¹² As the title of Jane Addam's 1912 book on the Chicago sex trade made clear, America had developed "a new conscience" regarding sex and the social evil.¹³ Everyone, it seems, was suddenly talking about sex. Leading this fervent discussion, George Bernard Shaw applauded Brioux for mentioning "the most unmentionable subject of all—the subject of the diseases that are supposed to be the punishment of profligate men and worthless women."¹⁴ An article in the *New Republic* likewise praised Brioux for "expos[ing] the conspiracy of syphilis and silence."¹⁵ By all accounts, then, the 1913 production of *Damaged Goods* signaled a major shift toward an openness in American public discourse on sexuality.

This view of *Damaged Goods* still prevails among the few scholars who have given attention to the play. For example, Allan M. Brandt, in his otherwise stunning 1987 social history of venereal disease in the United States, *No Magic Bullet*, claims that *Damaged Goods* "became a symbol of a new sexual

openness. A financial success, it spawned a series of dramas on sexual themes."¹⁶ Dramas on sexual themes, however, had long been performed on the New York stage. These were often at the very center of sex debates, igniting censorship and obscenity cases, riots in Times Square, and a profusion of discourse by newly emerging sex "experts." Claiming that *Damaged Goods* was "unprecedented in its open confrontation of sexual issues," and that it "attack[ed] hypocrisy and silence," Brandt replicates the logic of 1913 in reading *Damaged Goods* as a "transformation in sexual attitudes and practice."¹⁷ It is this logic that I now wish to interrogate.

The popular view that the American premiere of *Damaged Goods* had broken the "conspiracy of silence," or that public discussions about venereal disease and prostitution (the two topics were always related) had reached a new level, is simply incorrect. Although *Damaged Goods* initiated detailed discussions of venereal disease on the American stage, the United States, like many countries in Europe, had a long history of studying, legislating, and regulating these vices in other cultural realms. Prostitution and venereal disease were hardly absent from public debate. On the contrary, as Michel Foucault has shown in his *History of Sexuality*, sex was meticulously studied, discussed, and regulated ad infinitum both in pseudo-scientific and in official discourses, while nonetheless "exploiting it as the secret."¹⁸ As one reviewer remarked in 1913, there was much ado about a bogus taboo:

They thought they were removing a taboo. How they chattered between acts about the taboo! The taboo! George Bernard Shaw *raved* about the taboo! . . . As a matter of fact there was not one fact mentioned that the average citizen doesn't know.¹⁹

In Emma Goldman's words, then: "How is it that an institution, known almost to every child, should have been discovered so suddenly? How is it that this evil, known to all sociologists, should now be made such an important issue?"²⁰

I propose three reasons why *Damaged Goods* functioned as "sociological propaganda" (as the *New York Times* put it) between 1913 and the end of the First World War for groups as diverse as the social hygiene movement, antiprostitution reform, the White House, and the U.S. military.²¹ First, *Damaged Goods* promoted a social hygiene agenda that advocated sexual responsibility and premarital health examinations to prevent needless infection of spouses (primarily women) by their sporting mates. These goals were linked to a perceived national panic (or "hysteria," as the *Current Opinion* article claimed) about the threat of venereal disease to the so-called purity of the race. Maintaining the social hygiene of individual goods—within what Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have called the "the marital proscenium"—was part of a larger national ideology of purifying the national goods, a strategy that increasingly became allied with eugenics and antiprostitution efforts.²²

Second, *Damaged Goods* escaped censorship because its dramaturgy and *mise-en-scène* rendered the unseemly topic of venereal disease in a nonthreatening manner. Pedagogically driven (though certainly not in Brecht's sense), *Damaged Goods* more resembles a lecture than a problem play. Maintaining a scientific distance from its subject, the play focuses on message rather than dramatic conflict. Most important, however, *Damaged Goods* anchors the central conflict not in the contested site of the brothel but rather in the sanctified, bourgeois settings of a doctor's office and an upper-class home. Marriage is the "force field," to borrow Parker and Sedgwick's phrase, that holds together and warps the dramatic action of the play.²³ Accordingly, the main characters of this play are not the typical figures of the underworld (no Kitty Warrens or Anna Christies here), but rather people from the upper and professional classes. This dramaturgical framing, I suggest, protected bourgeois audiences from direct contact with the rank underworld.

Third, *Damaged Goods* advocated "proper" (read: hetero/reproductive, marital) sexuality by juxtaposing social hygiene with its nefarious counterpart—prostitution—in ambivalent terms, a framing characteristic of modernism itself. The play's ambivalence results from, on the one hand, demonstrating a liberal social hygiene agenda and sympathy toward the plight of prostitutes and other women contaminated by men, yet, on the other hand, characterizing the prostitute as what I call the *prostitute fatale*. Like her filmic descendant the *femme fatale*, the *prostitute fatale* represents the deadly part of pleasure, the evil side of the flower (as Baudelaire famously put it), the dangerous potential of unchecked female sexuality. A construct of the Progressive imagination, the *prostitute fatale* represents the dialectical tension between Eros and Thanatos—desire encased by necrophilia. Desired, yet feared, the *prostitute fatale* resides in an impossible space of representation. Constructed since Dumas *fills* 'La Dame aux Camélias' in 1852 as a hooker with a heart of gold, she reappears in the 1910s as a deadly source of contagion. Though a marginal or liminal figure, the *prostitute fatale*, paradoxically, becomes central to the definition of other subject positions: parent, wife, husband, national subject, innocent victim, and John.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS: LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

While Shaw and others saw *Damaged Goods* as breaking the conspiracy of silence regarding sex, America had a long history of sex debates clustered around the topic of prostitution. As Timothy Gilfoyle points out in his important study of prostitution in New York City, "By the midnineteenth century, commercial sex with its underground economy and subcultures of prostitutes and sporting men was not only a fact of everyday urban life but also a fixture of popular culture."²⁴ From the first wave of American antiprostitution reform creating Magdalene Societies in the 1830s to the debates of the second wave of reformers in the 1870s concerning how to deal with this "Necessary Evil," reformers divided into regulationists or abolitionists.²⁵ William Sanger's classic *History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes and Effects Throughout the World*

(1858), which reported the results of Sanger's interviews with two thousand prostitutes at Blackwell's Island Hospital in New York (where he was chief resident physician), linked unregulated prostitution to the spread of venereal disease, a position then utilized by regulationists to support their views. At the turn of the century, however, the regulationist view had failed as a strategy in most large cities, and vice commissions arose to study the "social evil" (no longer thought of as "necessary").

The first substantial study by an American vice commission, the Committee of Fifteen, was organized in New York City in 1900 to study "the spread of the Social Evil in certain districts, and . . . the extent of flagrant offenses against public morality and common decency."²⁶ Their report in 1902 pointed out the failures of regulation in Europe, particularly in containing venereal diseases, and advocated instead long-term measures furthering the "moral redemption of the human race from this degrading evil."²⁷ Their recommendations included preventing overcrowding in tenement houses, providing "purer and more elevating forms of amusement," improving the "material conditions of the wage-earning class and especially of young wage-earning women," better treatment of infected women (though stricter confinement for those who were "notoriously debauched"), and changing the law to characterize prostitution not as a crime but rather as a sin.²⁸ A final plea for "the creation of a special body of morals police" no doubt reflected the reformers' views of themselves as such a force.²⁹

Numerous vice commissions were created throughout the United States to study the prostitute and her supposed link to venereal disease. Virtually every city supported such an investigation, but New York's was the most comprehensive. The Committee of Fourteen (a later incarnation of the original Committee of Fifteen and formed in 1911) conducted extensive studies of commercialized vice, lobbied successfully for legislation, established Night Court for prostitutes, and worked with local improvement associations. Their enduring work over twenty-one years was, as Gilfoyle notes, "the most successful antiprostitution organization in New York City history, achieving an impressive array of reforms."³⁰ George Kneeland's important study, *Commercialized Prostitution in New York* (1913), offered a sympathetic view of the prostitutes Kneeland interviewed at the New York Bedford State Reformatory for Women and was a product of Rockefeller's Bureau of Social Hygiene (it appeared just two months after *Damaged Goods*' American premiere). In short, dozens of agencies and organizations emerged in New York in the 1910s in response to prostitution, part of a long pattern of studying, legislating, and regulating the "Social Evil," particularly after the turn of the century, a pattern that social historian Ruth Rosen has characterized as "one of Western society's most zealous and best-recorded campaigns against prostitution."³¹ Clearly, then, discussions concerning prostitution and venereal disease were not new; they were, in fact, very old discussions.

There was a similar cultural obsession with prostitutes in early twentieth-century American drama and theatre, which evoked disparate responses ranging from prurient intrigue to censorship. Between 1898 and 1922, approximately fifty plays about prostitution were produced in New York City. In addition, the Library of Congress and Robert Sherman's *Drama Cyclopedica* list approximately fifty more prostitute plays that were copyrighted during this time but never performed.³² Stormy obscenity trials racked the New York stage in the early twentieth century, reflecting the influence of Anthony Comstock, founder of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Comstock rang in the new millennium with the sensational arrest and trial of Olga Nethersole in her "sin-stained" production of *Sapho*.³³ In 1905, he halted George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* with a notorious obscenity case heard by the New York State Supreme Court.³⁴ While Comstock's reach was extensive, it was not limitless. In the season of 1908–1909, two prostitute plays, *Salvation Nell* and *The Easiest Way*, escaped censorship and were subsequently selected by John Gassner as "Best Plays of the Year."³⁵ Indeed, by 1913, there were so many plays about brothels on the New York stage that theatre critics regularly complained about their frequency.³⁶

In the fall of 1913, however, just months after *Damaged Goods* played at the White House, the tide turned once again toward censorship. Three brothel plays, *The Lure*, *The Fight*, and *House of Bondage*, were shut down by the New York police and became embroiled in the most controversial obscenity cases New York had witnessed since *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in 1905.³⁷ Also this year, Margaret Sanger's pamphlet about syphilis, *What Every Girl Should Know*, was confiscated by the Post Office, citing the Comstock Law.³⁸ The New York police did not touch *Damaged Goods*, however, when it opened in New York for a commercial run. The unimpeded American premiere of *Damaged Goods* is, at first glance, perplexing, but further scrutiny soon reveals why this "sociological sermon in three acts" captivated the nation.³⁹

SOCIAL HYGIENE TAKES THE STAGE

As perhaps no other play before it, *Damaged Goods* was literally produced by sexual science. Initially privately staged under the auspices of the Sociological Fund of the *Medical Review of Reviews*, *Damaged Goods* was part of what Foucault has termed the Western *scientia sexualis*, the scientific discourse that produces the "truth" of sex and (I would add) of gender.⁴⁰ To ensure that his dramatic depiction of syphilis was medically accurate, Brieux asked Alfred Fournier, noted venereologist and author of *Syphilis and Marriage* (1880), to assist him.⁴¹ Their collaboration was so intense that Brieux dedicated the play to Fournier, crediting him with most of the ideas for the plot.⁴² Fournier lent scientific credibility to the text, and *Damaged Goods* became known for its accurate, if shocking, medical information about venereal disease. As Brieux described it in the stage directions, the play's opening scene establishes the Doctor as the medical authority; his office literally basks in the light of morality (from "a large stained-glass window representing a religious subject") and is

filled with emblems of knowledge, including “a large glass bookcase.”⁴³ Portraits and busts of the founders of modern science (Wallace, Dupuytren, and Ricord) make up a minipanthéon in the background.⁴⁴ Unlike the British production, which portrayed a state-of-the-art scientific examination room, the American doctor’s office resembled an upscale parlor with plush leather furniture, rich hardwood paneling, and an ornately carved Edwardian desk. Flanked not only by the authority of science and religious morality but also by bourgeois respectability, the Doctor is unquestionably the voice of knowledge and mediator of the “truth” of sex and gender.

Damaged Goods was successful on so many fronts because it promoted a pro-social hygiene agenda by advocating a healthy and clean body politic, sexual education, and a single sexual standard for men and women. These three threads are woven into the moral fabric of the play. As act 1 unfolds, the protagonist, George DuPont (played by Richard Bennett), is at his doctor’s office, despondent at learning that he has contracted syphilis.⁴⁵ George seeks a quick fix to his problem, since he is soon to be married. At first denying that he has done anything to put himself in contagion’s way, George eventually confesses that he has had two mistresses while he was engaged, one the wife of his best friend (a woman “of the most rigid morals”) and the other an unsuspecting country girl (1.189). Misinformed about the nature of contagion, George chose both women because he believed that they were “clean.” Ironically, George had frightened one mistress into being faithful to him by exaggerating the extent of venereal disease in the city. He boasts to the Doctor, “I kept her in absolute terror of this disease. I told her that almost all men were taken with it, so that she mightn’t dream of being false to me” (1.189). *Damaged Goods*’ critique of George’s reprehensible behavior—and, in effect, of male sporting in general—was interpreted as radical when the play premiered. As an article in the *New York Independent* noted, “*Les Avariés*, when it was first presented in 1901, shocked all Paris, less apparently because of its disgusting subject than because of its stern condemnation of the double standard of morality.”⁴⁶ Twelve years after its French premiere, American audiences were receptive to a denunciation of male sporting, largely due to public debates instigated by the social hygiene movement. *Damaged Goods* therefore delivered an important critique of the male double (sex) standard, a critique that was very much in sync with American reform rhetoric.

Like a social hygiene pamphlet, *Damaged Goods* presents its message by reporting VD “facts” through the Doctor, who educates both the other characters in the play and the audience. As the Doctor tells George, “Out of every seven men you meet in the street, or in society, or at the theatre, there is at least one who is or has been in your condition. One in seven, fifteen per cent” (1.188). Social hygienists and other reformers made similar arguments about the escalation of VD. According to Dr. Prince Morrow, leader of the social hygiene movement and founder of the American Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, up to 80 percent of all New York City males had contracted gonorrhoea at some point, and,

he concluded, “fully one-eighth of all human suffering comes from this source.”⁴⁷ In addition, *Damaged Goods* brought gory and sensational details about venereal disease to light. In the opening scene, for instance, the Doctor recounts, “I have seen an unfortunate young woman changed by this disease into the likeness of a beast. The face, or I should rather say, what remained of it, was nothing but a flat surface seamed with scars” (1.202).⁴⁸

In advocating clean sexual hygiene and rejecting a double standard for sexuality, Brioux’s play echoed another tenet of social hygiene ideology: its sanctification of marriage and reproductive sex. As a flier advertising *Damaged Goods* proclaimed, “The object of this play is a study of the Sex Problem in its bearing on marriage.”⁴⁹ While the threat to marriage through infidelity was a staple theme in nineteenth-century theatre and literature, never had the institution of marriage been so drastically imperiled by venereal disease onstage as it was in this play. Indeed, the central dramatic conflict hinges on George’s tenacious refusal to postpone his marriage until he takes the full cure. Disastrously, George ignores the Doctor, visits a quack, marries on time, and infects his wife and newborn child.

Damaged Goods’ depiction of George dovetailed with the Progressive preoccupation with protecting against “venereal insontium,” the infection of innocent women and children by husbands and fathers with venereal diseases.⁵⁰ Defending the health of the innocent was taken up most publicly by Dr. Prince Morrow, who viewed venereal disease as a threat to the existence of the family, the reproductive organ of the national body. Morrow’s *Social Disease and Marriage* (1904) argued not only that venereal disease was dangerous for the institution of marriage, but also that it struck “at the very root of nature’s process for the perpetuation of the race.”⁵¹ Seeing the social body as a large version of the individual healthy body, social hygienists like Morrow directed many of their educational materials at women. In *Good Housekeeping*, Morrow wrote:

From the sociopolitical standpoint, children are the only excuse for marriage—not offspring merely, but children born in conditions of vitality, health, and physical vigor, and capable of becoming useful citizens to the state. This gives a new and more exalted conception of the responsibilities of parentage.⁵²

In Morrow’s view, reproductivity was not only a parental virtue, but also a national responsibility, sentiments vital to the plot of *Damaged Goods*. This national quest for vital offspring was manifested in the baby shows of August 1913, which awarded cash for the healthiest babies in welfare neighborhoods.⁵³

The central trope of the play, that of “damaged goods,” demonstrates the play’s investment in marriage and nation building. John Pollock’s translation of Brioux’s title, *Les Avariés* (“The Syphilitics”), as *Damaged Goods*—which

William Dean Howells thought “a very vulgar misnomer”—renders the problem quite literally as an economic matter.⁵⁴ What is damaged in this play is, on one level, a family. Because the central victims are George’s unsuspecting wife and child, *Damaged Goods* seems to take up the first-wave feminist insight about marriage as a business transaction, where women are exchanged as goods between men (as Emma Goldman once remarked),⁵⁵ and to overlay nationalistic and pure race agendas upon it. In George’s mind, postponing his marriage would be “absolutely disastrous,” since he is marrying into money, which he needs for business purposes (1.196). While the Doctor is quick to rebuke George for acting recklessly, he does so by refashioning the economic metaphor so that the goods are gendered male: “Marriage is a contract. If you marry without saying anything, you will be giving an implied warranty for goods which you know to be bad. . . . It would be a fraud which ought to be punishable by law” (1.198). Here, we see Brieux’s plea for premarital VD testing and for men like George to assume responsibility, yet the Doctor’s rhetoric privileges a male economy wherein men have power over the goods, indeed, where they *are* the goods. According to the logic of the play, George’s mistake is not that he callously views his wife as investment capital but that he is a bad businessman. He allows his goods—his semen and, eventually, his genetic stock—to be damaged.

As the play’s title reveals, then, *Damaged Goods* problematized real damage: the needless infection of wives and newborns by their husbands/fathers. In addition to its progressive critique of sporting male sexuality, however, the figurative framing of the problem as a business problem (i.e., as damaged goods), rather than as a venereal disease, contributed to national anxieties about racial purity. For example, unable to convince George to wait three years before marrying in order to undergo a proper cure, the Doctor changes his strategy and appeals to George’s patriotism through the rhetoric of race suicide:

DOCTOR: For the moment I will not think of you or of [your wife]: it is in the name of those innocent little ones that I appeal to you; it is the future of the race that I am defending. (1.204)

Healthy, reproductive bodies—or goods—were increasingly theorized as integral to nation making and the preservation of white middle-class supremacy over the lower classes and ethnic minorities. Morrow echoed this anxiety: “[T]he chief social danger of venereal diseases comes from their destructive effects on the health and the productive energy of the family. The office of social hygiene . . . embraces . . . those who are destined to continue the race. This protective duty extends to the unborn children.”⁵⁶ This view is articulated at the end of *Damaged Goods*:

DOCTOR: [Those who contract syphilis] ought to be made to understand that the future of the race is in their hands and to be taught to transmit the

great heritage they have received from their ancestors intact with all its possibilities to their descendants. (3.249)

The gravity of George's mistake then, is that he has damaged not only his "goods" but also his reproductive legacy.

At the conclusion of *Damaged Goods*, pure race ideology is fused with a reinscription of patriarchal order. In order to protect the DuPonts' ancestral legacy, the Doctor suggests that George's wife, Henriette, should forgive him and rescue their marriage. He tells Henriette's father, "If your daughter consents to forgive and forget, he will not only respect her, he will be eternally grateful. . . . As for the future, we will make sure that when they are reunited their next child shall be healthy and vigorous" (3.242). Above all, this scene suggests, marriage and heteroreproductivity (in the upper, "clean," classes) need to be salvaged for the greater good of the nation. In offering marriage as denouement, however, *Damaged Goods* resorts to very old dramaturgy indeed. It was far too late in the millennium for Henriette to marry her (diseased) man and forget all. Nora had already walked out that door. Indeed, New York City's mayor, William J. Gaynor, found the Doctor's final suggestion a type of bad conduct prize, observing, according to Edward L. Bernays, financial supporter for *Damaged Goods*' first performance, "that the ending of the play, where the husband and wife reunite (the danger having passed), ruined the impact of the play as a whole. As far as he was concerned, the ending aided the cause of men who sought out prostitutes."⁵⁷

As committed as *Damaged Goods* was to marriage and eugenics, Brioux staunchly advocated education for women as well as men, a liberal stance at the time. As Brioux put it, *Damaged Goods* "may be witnessed by everyone, unless we must believe that folly and ignorance are necessary conditions of female virtue."⁵⁸ Women like Mrs. Helen Brent of the New York Legislative League agreed: "The women of this country certainly owe Mr. Richard Bennett a debt of gratitude."⁵⁹ Indeed, female theatregoers attended *Damaged Goods* in notable numbers, as the *New York Dramatic Mirror* reported: "Women if anything were in the majority. They seemed to belong to the better class and applauded vociferously such lines as had a more or less direct bearing on social conditions and evil."⁶⁰ Other reviewers commented not only on the reaction of female audiences, a kind of scrutiny not directed at male audience members, but speculated about their politics. The *New York Independent*, for example, noted that the Fulton Theatre was packed with an audience that included "suffragists,"⁶¹ while another reviewer (somewhat disparagingly) reported, "Hundreds of women (with a 'mission') applauded vociferously."⁶² A particularly nasty review in the *New York American* both insulted the playwright and objectified female theatregoers: "Its only remarkable feature was its audience. That, made up of extraordinary-looking women, was worth looking at."⁶³ Though it is unclear just how seriously women were taken in 1913, either as audience

members or as political subjects, the extent to which observers sought to make sense of their presence (as either “vociferous” audiences, suffragists, or women to be properly educated about VD) is worth noting.

At the same time that *Damaged Goods* advocated a certain liberal view regarding sexual education for both men and women, it also recycled traditional gender roles, especially in its celebration of maternity, pure womanhood, and sexual propriety. As a flier advertising the New York production boasted, “Women Hail Brieux’ Play as a Champion of Motherhood.”⁶⁴ Brieux capitalized on maternity as a metaphor, and he is quoted in publicity as saying that “health is a form of virtue, that it is the mother of virtue[,] that each one of us should be in good health.”⁶⁵ In promoting a new, morally hygienic national identity, Brieux, like others in the social hygiene movement, reconstructed residual Victorian notions of pure womanhood. Like their nineteenth-century counterpart, the “Angel in the House,” Progressive Era women were encouraged to cultivate hygienically (and morally) clean domiciles—indeed, the angelic image was used in a British poster for *Damaged Goods*, which depicted the Virgin Mary presiding over the weeping Henriette and her infected child. In Progressive Era culture, maternity—a woman’s “highest destiny,” according to Prince Morrow—was valued above all else.⁶⁶ Doctors in particular stressed this view. “The supreme importance of woman,” wrote one physician in 1906, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, lies in “her roll [*sic*] as the nourishing mother, her place as the very foundation stone of every hearth and home, and her life as the vital center about which cluster families and tribes and nations.”⁶⁷

As if in response to the cultural impulse for what Bernarr MacFadden in 1918 characterized as “vigorous motherhood,”⁶⁸ *Damaged Goods* validated the institution visibly through the character of George’s wife. “Poor innocent little Henriette,” as George calls her, is innocent not only because she and her baby are unknowingly infected with syphilis but also because she has been kept innocent about venereal diseases and about sexuality outside of marriage (2.211). Henriette does not participate in the dialogue concerning venereal disease; Brieux leaves those matters to the men in her life, who have lengthier scenes.⁶⁹ Hearing the grim reality that she and her baby are infected, Henriette can only “shriek like a mad woman” and scream, “Don’t touch me!” (2.234). Resorting to the old trope of female madness, Brieux locates national sex hysteria in Henriette’s shrieking female body.⁷⁰ Significantly, this hysterical scene is her last moment in the play: Henriette does not deal with the consequences of infection (as do George and the Doctor); she does not discuss the pros and cons of antiprostitution reform (as do Loches and the Doctor); nor does she lament that her monogamy was all for naught (as, with inverted logic, does George). Rather, Henriette is consigned to a brief mad scene and then silenced for the remainder of the play. Even so, this scene was tellingly described by the *New York Times* as the “most powerful and affecting” of the entire play.⁷¹

Just as Progressive America ambivalently relegated sexual regulation largely to medical, juridical, and legislative domains (the regulators of sexuality in the Foucauldian sense), so *Damaged Goods* struck “sex o’clock” in a similarly ambivalent way. On the one hand, the play advocated a liberal social hygiene agenda that struck down the double standard for sexuality, sought to bring women into sex debates, and tried to eliminate venereal contagion. On the other hand, however, the play invested heavily in marriage, motherhood, eugenics, and an ideology about gender roles that both commodified married sexuality and served nation building.

DRAMATIC SERMONS AND LAUNDERED SCENES

In addition to its advocacy of social hygiene, *Damaged Goods*’ sermon-like dramaturgy, a characteristic that was both applauded and condemned, helped it escape the censor’s wrath. Critics faulted the play as “hardly drama in its accepted conventional form”,⁷² indeed, the *Dial* called it “a thesis without a play.”⁷³ The *World* noted that, while “few more instructive or beneficial works have been written . . . to call it a play is equally ridiculous.”⁷⁴ H. E. Stearns of the *New York Dramatic Mirror* maintained *Damaged Goods* was “a preconceived intellectual thesis” with “morbidly unreal” characters, and he compared Brieux’s dramaturgy negatively to Ibsen’s: “*Ghosts* is the work of a dramatist; *Damaged Goods* of a discussionist.”⁷⁵ James Metcalfe of *Life Magazine* suggested that the play was nothing more than a “medical treatise sugar-coated for general consumption by its background of scenery, impersonations and a semblance of story.”⁷⁶ The *New York Times* observed, “[T]he third act is more in the nature of an exhibit, a summoning, as it were, of the arguments in concrete tangible symbols with no positive definite association with the dramatic structure that has gone before. . . . The play as a play practically ends, however, with the closing of the second act.”⁷⁷ The *New York American* joined the chorus of reviewers who faulted *Damaged Goods* for its “discussionist” dramaturgy, finding the “long dissertations” of the actors “tiresome” and unimaginative.⁷⁸

Promotional brochures proclaimed *Damaged Goods* “More Powerful than [the] Greatest Sermon,” and they were not alone in viewing the stage as a pulpit.⁷⁹ According to an editorial in the *New York Globe*, “*Damaged Goods* is a tract, a pamphlet, a sermon—one of the most awakening and hard-hitting we have ever read or heard. It proves, more completely than any other play we can remember, that the theatre can be the most influential pulpit in the world.”⁸⁰ The play’s “campaign of education” was supported by “the most progressive bodies of social workers,” clergy, and Progressive reformers.⁸¹ “It’s a moral lesson so strong,” added another review, “that it should be given at some theatre gratis, by the city, so that all may witness it.”⁸² As late as 1915, Brieux continued to defend the mix of pulpit and stage, calling for “drama as an instrument of reform, not as a form of art or a means of recreation.”⁸³

If there was a discernable sermon-like aesthetic to the play, certainly a hygienic *mise-en-scène* contributed to it. Brieux located scenes in proper,

bourgeois settings: the Doctor's office and the DuPont's upper-class home. By contrast, other prostitute plays from the 1913 Broadway season—*The Lure*, *The Fight*, and *House of Bondage*, all of which portrayed the tabooed space of the brothel interior—quickly became embroiled in high-profile obscenity cases. The producers of these three plays were required to cut the brothel scenes before the New York Grand Jury and police would drop charges, though the cuts produced laundered scenes that no longer made sense. In *The Lure*, for example, playwright George Scarborough replaced the second-act brothel with an employment bureau, making Kate, the brothel's madam, the office manager. Spartan mission furniture was substituted for the brothel's flashy gilt chairs and upholstered couch, and Madam Kate's absinthe was replaced by Manager Kate's tea, changes ridiculed by the press.⁸⁴ As laughable as these alterations were, however, the censorship was rightly perceived by *Theatre Magazine* "as critical as any in [the theatre's] history."⁸⁵ Benign in its own dramaturgical framing, however, *Damaged Goods* never ventured into the underworld proper and thus escaped censorship.

Damaged Goods' "discussionist" dramaturgy and sanitized *mise-en-scène* allowed certain kinds of knowledge to be represented—epistemologies with hegemonic framings. Yet, within this socially hygienic framework, the underworld seeps like a slow, nonetheless dangerous, leak in a cracked dam. Enter the *prostitute fatale*.

THE PROSTITUTE FATALE

In celebrating reproductive, innocent female bodies, *Damaged Goods* vilified their counterparts: the wretched bodies of the underworld. *Damaged Goods*' stunning success, both with the elite ranks of government and New York audiences, focused early twentieth-century American anxieties about sexuality, contagion, race suicide, women's rights, and urbanization upon the body of the prostitute, a liminal figure, offering a corporeal site upon which desires and cultural imperatives could be mapped. In both *Damaged Goods* and early twentieth-century American theatre more generally, the prostitute has an uncanny central presence—paradoxically, even when absent. The prostitute figure is a construct of an array of modernist discourses, of which theatre is one. As Shannon Bell has argued: "[T]he prostitute' was actively produced as a marginalized social-sexual identity, particularly during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century."⁸⁶ Imagined as an Other in juxtaposition to respectable bourgeois identity, the "prostitute-construct" fulfilled the function of segregating normative from deviant sexuality. In *Damaged Goods*, the forces of social hygiene, Progressivism, and pseudoscience struggle to control sexual discourse through the figure of the prostitute.

Conceptualizing the prostitute as the figure who guides us through the chaotic labyrinth of modernity has old, philosophical roots. In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Baudelaire observed that the prostitute is the

allegory of modernity.⁸⁷ Indeed, Baudelaire placed much intellectual (if not libidinal) capital in the enterprise of prostitution, which he viewed, according to Walter Benjamin, as “the yeast which allows the metropolitan masses to rise.”⁸⁸ As in Baudelaire’s sex-inflected poetry, the whore counts significantly in Benjamin’s dialectical treatises on modernity: “In the prostitution of the metropolis,” he writes, “the woman herself becomes an article that is mass-produced.”⁸⁹ So viewed, prostitution becomes the framework for an analysis of mass production, modern technology, and the entry of women into the urban work force,⁹⁰ and the prostitute functions as the personification, or allegorization, of this set of changes.

As feminist critics have shown, there are limitations to Baudelaire’s and to Benjamin’s analyses.⁹¹ Yet the modernist fascination with prostitution allows us to read *Damaged Goods*’ portrayal of the prostitute-figure as “a prime dialectical image because of the ambivalence inherent in her status as both ‘commodity and seller’ in one.”⁹² As a destabilizing force, the prostitute-figure provoked a kind of cultural “binary terror,” threatening oppositions that were central to early twentieth-century hegemonic order: whore/virgin, commodity/seller, public/private, and so on. According to Rebecca Schneider, the prostitute “embodied a bizarre and potentially terroristic collapse of active and passive, subject and object, into a single entity.”⁹³

In *Damaged Goods*, the prostitute-figure provoked binary terror in the form of perceived sex hysteria. Though it attempted to bring closure to this terror, *Damaged Goods* is itself an ambivalent text, indelibly marked by the polarities of modernity. On the one hand, the play demonstrates a liberal social hygiene agenda and sympathy for the plight of prostitutes and other women contaminated by men. On the other hand, it perpetuates stereotypes of the infectious creature of the night: the *prostitute fatale*. This bundling of inconsistent representations demonstrates the ambivalence of Progressive culture, and indeed of modernity itself, in characterizing the terror of sexualities.

Although a prostitute does not make an entrance on stage until the last act of *Damaged Goods*, there are constant allusions to her. In the first act, when George learns he is infected, for example, he protests, “I didn’t take a woman off the streets, you know” (1.193). Since George has not slept with a prostitute, he thinks he is safe from contagion, subscribing to the one-way contamination theory that dominated the day: venereal disease could be transmitted only by women from the sexual underworld to men of the upper class. When this theory proves wrong, George articulates his unfulfilled desire for the prostitute:

GEORGE: But for nothing! nothing! I have cut myself off from all pleasures. I have resisted attractions as you would the devil. I wouldn’t go with my friends to places of amusement: ladies I knew actually pointed me out to their boys as an example. . . . Oh, I should have liked to come home at four o’clock in the morning with my coat-collar turned

up, smoking a cigar lit in some ballet-girl's rooms! I've longed as much as anyone for the taste of rouged lips and the glitter of blacked eyes and pale faces! (1.191)

George's regret that he hadn't tasted the rouged lips of a prostitute or ballet girl reveals the conflicted cultural response to women who were (or were presumed to be) sexual, imagined as the corporeal site both of pleasure and of infection. As the Doctor puts it at the conclusion of the play, "The whole problem is summed up in her: she is at once the product and the cause" (3.253).

On the surface, *Damaged Goods* rallies sympathy for the plight of prostitutes. In the final scene, George's enraged father-in-law, Loches, wants to do away with prostitution:

LOCHES: I realize now that what is needed is to attack this evil at its source and to suppress prostitution. We ought to hound out these vile women who poison the very life of society.

DOCTOR: You forget that they themselves have first been poisoned (3.249).

Indeed, this is true of the Doctor's final patient in the play, a prostitute who, while working as a domestic at the age of seventeen, was raped by her boss and subsequently became pregnant.⁹⁴ After losing her position, she turned to prostitution: "[W]hen you're hungry and a jolly young chap offers you a dinner, my word, I'd like to see the girl who'd say no. I never learnt any trade you see" (3.252–53). Though this character is no Kitty Warren and her speech is relatively brief, it is nonetheless a rare moment in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American dramaturgy when a figure otherwise criminalized and censored on the stage is given a voice.⁹⁵

Damaged Goods also argues against regressive antiprostitution legislation, such as the Page Law of 1910 (and, later, the America Plan), which incarcerated large numbers of allegedly infected prostitutes in medical prisons "until cured"—which, according to Rosen, was 365 days on average.⁹⁶ This lopsided practice of interning prostitutes and not their johns is indicted in *Damaged Goods* by the streetwalker: "These beastly men give you their foul diseases and it's me they stick in prison" (3.253). When Loches, a city official, continues to argue that new laws are needed to regulate this vice, the Doctor urges tolerance and education rather than legislation: "No, no! We want no new laws: there are too many already. All that is needed is for people to understand the nature of this disease rather better" (3.240). The correlation between these lines and Brioux's own beliefs was exact. "Brioux," explained one critic, "is not one who believes that social evils are to be cured by laws and yet more laws. He . . . urges education."⁹⁷

While most vice reports in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries expressed sympathy for prostitutes and the conditions that drove them to their

trade (Sanger, the Committee of Fifteen, the Committee of Fourteen, and Kneeland), they nonetheless proposed solutions that launched vigorous antiprostitution movements intimately linked to anxieties about urbanization and the commercialization of vice. As Brandt has shown, VD became a social symbol of contamination, a sign of a decaying social order perceived as out of control, dirty, and untidy. Brandt points out, “The very term which the venereal disease control movement took for itself in the twentieth century—social hygiene—makes explicit this association.”⁹⁸ Similarly, Sander Gilman argues that the desire to distance oneself from disease is an expression of a larger fear of chaos, disintegration, and collapse, which gets mapped onto an Other:

The fear we have of our own collapse does not remain internalized. Rather, we project this fear onto the world in order to localize it and, indeed, to domesticate it. For once we locate it, the fear of our own dissolution is removed. Then it is not we who totter on the brink of collapse, but rather the Other. And it is an-Other who has already shown his or her vulnerability by having collapsed.⁹⁹

The presence of venereal disease in the upper and middle classes at the turn of the century was painful proof that intercourse with the lower-class, damaged Other, the prostitute, existed. The new logic of social hygiene asserted that damaged goods must be cured—even if they belonged to the underworld—but only as part of a national strategy to save the national goods. As L. Duncan Bulkey put it in 1906, venereal diseases could never be eliminated until “the lowest levels of society are influenced toward their prevention.”¹⁰⁰ Such sentiments drove aggressive antiprostitution efforts to eradicate red-light districts, most of which had been eliminated by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century.

Despite its progressive views, *Damaged Goods* perpetuated these lingering myths about prostitution and contagion. Although the beginning of the play suggests that VD can be contracted from anyone and not just prostitutes (George is infected by his friend’s wife), the remaining scenes suggest otherwise. In the last act, for example, when Loches expresses the irreparable damage George has done to his family, his complaint is not just that his daughter has been infected, but that, through bodily fluids, she came into contact with a prostitute:

LOCHES: This man [George] has inflicted on his wife the supreme insult, the most odious degradation. He has, as it were, thrust her into contact with the streetwalker with whose vice he is stained, and created between her and that common thing a bond of blood to poison herself and her child. Thanks to him, this abject creature, this prostitute, lives our life, makes one of our family, sits down with us at the table. (3.238–39)

In this passage, Brieux echoes Morrow’s point that the Angel in the House and the Fallen Woman were linked through men’s intercourse with them: “It is with

this fatal gift,” Morrow wrote of VD, “that the courtesan repays her virtuous sister for the scorn and contempt which are heaped upon her, and by a strange irony of fate the husband is made bearer of this venom, and administers it to his family.”¹⁰¹ Though men are bearers of the poison, this logic tells us, prostitutes are its source.

The conclusion of *Damaged Goods* repeats this view. Three patients keep appointments with the Doctor during Loches’ visit: a widowed upper-class woman left bankrupt and infected by her husband; a young college student; and a domestic-turned-prostitute. Each provides a kind of Foucauldian confession about unregulated sexuality. Though these three characters are meant to represent various stations in life and to suggest that venereal disease affects everyone alike, the first two locate the source of contagion with a prostitute (and the last, of course, is herself one). The upper-class widow became infected and was unable to bear children as a result of her husband’s exploits with prostitutes while in the army. As she explains, “I couldn’t ever bring one [baby] to birth, sir. My husband was taken at the very beginning of our marriage, while he was doing his time as a reservist. There are women that hang about the barracks” (3.247). Brieux clearly suggests that infectious women haunt not only soldiers but also civilians, as the account of the father of the college-student patient (now paralyzed by VD) demonstrates: “It was at the very college gates that my poor boy was got hold of by one of these women. Is it right, sir, that that should be allowed? Aren’t there enough police to prevent children of fifteen from being seduced like that? I ask, is it right?” (3.247–48).

The most incriminating evidence, however, comes from the prostitute herself, in the final testimonial.¹⁰² Her confession begins (as we have seen) with a sympathetic account of her fall into prostitution, but it concludes with her transformation into the *prostitute fatale*, a ruthless killer, not unlike the contemporary mythic “Patient Zero”:¹⁰³

GIRL: Oh, I had my tit for tat! . . . I took on everyone I could, for anything or for nothing! As many as I could, all the youngest and the best looking—well, I only gave ’em back what they gave me! (3.253)

As Gilman has shown, locating the prostitute as the central source of blame evoked a long and rich tradition of representing the syphilitic as a sexually corrupt female.¹⁰⁴ Referencing this iconography, this scene established a kind of melodramatic urgency behind eliminating the prostitute. When *Damaged Goods* toured Boston in December 1913, the part of the streetwalker was the only part cut when the mayor found the play “disgusting.”¹⁰⁵ New York’s Mayor Gaynor, however, thought the prostitute’s character exaggerated. “The scene where the woman had relations with men for the purpose of spreading the disease was farfetched,” Gaynor said, “No woman would act in such a manner.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, such avenging behavior is more typical of a *femme fatale* in film noir. Just as the *femme fatale* was a figure to be contained and even

eradicated, so the “diseased whore” sparked a national war on prostitution—an action that dovetailed with World War One.

When America began to prepare for war, *Damaged Goods* was once again enlisted to educate the nation, this time under the aegis of the United States Army. In 1917, the War Department asked Richard Bennett, who had co-produced the New York version of *Damaged Goods* and starred as George, to tour with the filmed version of the play, to help educate servicemen about VD. In order to reach as many soldiers as possible, the military sent Bennett with the film to France to give lectures. Here, quite literally, the army sought to produce sexual truths.¹⁰⁷ The film and its use by the army provide a celluloid epilogue to the discussion of the *prostitute fatale*.¹⁰⁸

Just as the play’s reception demonstrates that *Damaged Goods* did not break a conspiracy of silence, neither did the 1914 film adaptation of the play initiate new discussions about sex and prostitution. Rather, the film recycled existing antiprostitution sentiments, much as the awareness about venereal disease and infection, which the war supposedly inaugurated, duplicated the already familiar messages against prostitution outlined above. Even so, panic about venereal disease peaked during the war years, as its threat to the nation’s health reached what were perceived to be epidemic proportions. Indeed, according to military sources in 1917, “venereal diseases . . . are the greatest cause of disability in the Army and present the most serious communicable disease problem of the war.”¹⁰⁹

If venereal disease was perceived as the greatest liability to the nation at war, then the prostitute was viewed as the primary contaminator. Her body, considered public property, was once again the site of regulation. War was declared not only abroad but also at home, as “the anti-vice movement developed into a full-scale repressive movement against the prostitute,” with the United States government at its head.¹¹⁰ The military launched a two-pronged attack: to educate soldiers about venereal disease, and to regulate a five-mile zone around each military camp in which any suspicious woman could be arrested as a prostitute, tested for venereal disease, and detained until “cured.” Known as the America Plan, Gilfoyle calls this effort by the War Department’s Commission on Training Camp Activities “the most aggressive attack on prostitution in the nation’s history.”¹¹¹

As part of its new approach to sexual morality, the military made it clear that interacting with prostitutes was, quite literally, sleeping with the enemy. One pamphlet stated, “Women who solicit soldiers for Immoral purposes are usually disease spreaders and friends of the enemy.”¹¹² Another pamphlet cautioned, “You wouldn’t eat or drink anything that you knew would weaken your vitality, poison your blood, cripple your limbs, rot your flesh, blind your eyes, [or] destroy your brain. Why take the same chance with a whore?”¹¹³ Hundreds of posters, like one headed “A German Bullet is Cleaner Than A

Whore,” equated prostitutes with the foreign foe.¹¹⁴ Perceived as the enemy, the *prostitute fatale* was represented in popular culture as so fatal that she herself must be obliterated. The ensuing antiprostitution campaign was so successful that, by 1920, prostitution had declined and been driven underground. As Gilfoyle notes, “New York’s century of prostitution had ended”—though not without serious consequences for prostitutes.¹¹⁵



In the interest of constructing a hygienically pure national identity, the film and stage versions of *Damaged Goods* located disease in the body of the prostitute, a familiar target for sexual moralists and reformers. As the first venereal disease drama to take center stage, *Damaged Goods* occupies an important position in American theatre and film history. Embraced by the social hygiene movement, the U.S. government, and the military, *Damaged Goods* may be the most officially sanctioned drama about sex in American history. It is certainly one of the most flagrant examples of (mis)educating the nation about gender, sexual hygiene, the sanctity of marriage, and the purity of the race. In a theatre season otherwise characterized by censorship, the American success of *Damaged Goods* in 1913 reveals a deployment of sex discourse that must be read closely. As a response to the binary terror of VD and its imagined counterpart, the prostitute, *Damaged Goods* is an ambivalent text, marked by the ambivalent characteristics of modernity itself. Important for the awareness it generated about venereal disease and male sporting, the play offered its knowledges within distinctly pseudoscientific, bourgeois, and heteronormative framings. The *prostitute fatale* appears in this play not because Brioux wished to demonize the whore but, rather, because she is unimaginable other than as the allegorical “flower of evil.” In the end, *Damaged Goods* dramatized conflicting cultural desires concerning commercialized vice, but it remained unable to conjure problems or solutions for them without the prostitute-construct, a figure it both desired and despised.

ENDNOTES

1. The staging of Ibsen’s *Ghosts* in New York in 1894 was the first reference to venereal disease on the American stage. Unlike *Ghosts*, which never explicitly mentions syphilis, *Damaged Goods* focused on venereal disease as a central theme and discussed the condition in vivid medical terms.

2. “Excerpts, Opinions, Etc. of *Damaged Goods*,” unidentified pamphlet in the *Damaged Goods* clipping file in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Collection [hereafter, the NYPLPA].

3. Scholars bracket the Progressive Era differently, depending on their scope of study. I agree with social historian Ruth Rosen’s definition that the Progressive Era marks the time of intense American reform movements from the turn of the century until 1918. This is not meant to erase extensive reform efforts as early as the 1830s. Perhaps it is more accurate to describe this period (1900–1918) as the latter half of the Progressive Era. See Lewis L. Gould’s *America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1914*, Seminar Studies in History (Essex, U.K.: Pearson Education Limited, 2001). For Progressive reformation, see Mark Connelly’s *The Response to Prostitution in the*

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Progressive Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and David J. Pivar's *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868–1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).

4. Worried that the production might be shut down on charges of obscenity, the producers of *Damaged Goods* first staged the play privately under the auspices of the Sociological Fund of the *Medical Review of Reviews* on 14 and 17 March 1913, at the Fulton Theatre.

5. The performance for the president and his cabinet was at the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., on 6 April 1913. "Excerpts, Opinions, Etc. of *Damaged Goods*," n.p.

6. The public premiere of *Damaged Goods* was 14 April at the Fulton Theatre. The production ran for 66 performances in New York, and later toured. See Edward L. Bernays, *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), 53–62.

7. Unidentified clipping from *Damaged Goods* clipping file, NYPLPA.

8. Ibid.

9. "Excerpts, Opinions, Etc. of *Damaged Goods*," n.p.

10. *Damaged Goods* was first rehearsed at Théâtre Antoine in Paris in November 1901 but was forbidden by the censor. The premiere took place at the Théâtre du Gymnase in 1902. A second presentation was performed in Brussels at the Théâtre du Parc in 1905. The ban in France was lifted in 1905, and the first full premiere for Paris took place at the Théâtre Antoine on 22 February 1905. The first performance in England was given privately by the Adelphi Play Society in 1912 at London's Chelsea Arts Club, before the Lord Chamberlain approved *Damaged Goods* for public performance. By 1914, *Damaged Goods* had played at 214 theatres around England ("*Damaged Goods*," otherwise unidentified pamphlet from the St. Martin's 1917 clipping file at Theatre Museum of London).

11. "Sex O'Clock in America," *Current Opinion* 55.2 (August 1913): 113–14.

12. Ibid., 113.

13. Known for her work in settlement houses and for urban reform, Addams argued that society should have sympathy for women who turn to prostitution out of economic necessity. See Jane Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912).

14. George Bernard Shaw, introduction to Eugène Brieux, *Three Plays by Brieux*, trans. John Pollock (New York: Brentano's, 1911), xlvi.

15. "Brieux," *New Republic*, 21 November, 1914, 20.

16. Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 47. Though I critique Brandt on this point, I am indebted to his stellar research and for introducing me to *Damaged Goods*.

17. Ibid., 48.

18. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 35.

19. Review of *Damaged Goods*, by Eugène Brieux, as performed by Richard Bennett's Coworkers at the Fulton Theatre, New York, 14 and 17 March 1913, *New York American*, quoted in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 19 March 1913, n.p. (italics in the original).

20. Emma Goldman, "The Traffic in Women," in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1911; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 177.

21. Review of *Damaged Goods*, by Eugène Brieux, as performed by Richard Bennett's Coworkers at the Fulton Theatre, New York, 14 March 1913, "Brieux Play Acted," *New York Times*, 15 March 1913, 13.

22. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, intro. and eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

23. Ibid.

24. Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 157.

25. For the history of antiprostitution reform, see Ruth Rosen's *The Lost Sisterhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), as well as Gilfoyle, Connelly, and Pivar.

26. Committee of Fifteen, *The Social Evil with Special Reference to Conditions Existing in the City of New York* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), v.
27. *Ibid.*, 172.
28. *Ibid.*, 172–76.
29. *Ibid.*, 179.
30. Gilfoyle, 304.
31. Rosen, xi.
32. See Robert L. Sherman, *Drama Cyclopedica: A Bibliography of Plays and Players* (Chicago: Robert Sherman, 1944), and Library of Congress Copyright Office, *Dramatic Compositions Copyrighted in the United States, 1870–1916* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918).
33. A jury found Nethersole not guilty of obscenity after just fifteen minutes of deliberation. See Katie N. Johnson, “Censoring *Sapho*: Regulating the Fallen Woman and the Prostitute on the New York Stage,” *ATQ: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* 10.3 (September 1996): 167–86.
34. The cast and producer of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* were arrested on charges of obscenity when the show premiered in New York City in 1905. (Shaw was conveniently out of the country.) Charges were subsequently dismissed by the State Supreme Court.
35. See John Gassner, ed., *Best Plays of the Early American Theatre, from the Beginning to 1916* (New York: Crown, 1967).
36. The white slave plays performed during the 1913–1914 season in New York City include *Any Night*, by Edward Ellis; *The Fight*, by Bayard Veiller; *The Lure*, by George Scarborough; *House of Bondage*, adapted by Joseph Byron Totten; *Tiger*, by Witter Bynner; *The Traffic*, by Rachel Marshall and Oliver Bailey; *Ourselves*, by Rachel Crothers; and *Little Lost Sister*, adapted by Arthur James Pegler and Edward Rose. For an overview of white slavery plays and their impact on the regulation of female sexuality, see M. Joan McDermott and Sarah J. Blackstone, “White Slavery Plays of the 1910s: Fear of Victimization and the Social Control of Sexuality,” *Theatre History Studies* 16 (June 1996): 141–55.
37. See “The Rising Tide of Realism in the American Drama,” *Current Opinion* 55 (October 1913): 250–51; Olga Nethersole, “Sex Dramas To-day and Yesterday,” *Green Book Magazine* 10.1 (January 1914): 20–35; and Gary Luter, “Sexual Reform on the American Stage in the Progressive Era, 1900–1915” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1981), 101–17.
38. Although Congress adopted its first law barring obscenity in the mail in 1865, Anthony Comstock lobbied both houses in 1873 to ensure new legislation that would make liable not only the author but also the publisher and distributor of the so-called obscene literature. See Morris L. Ernst and Alan U. Schwartz, *Censorship: The Search for the Obscene* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964), 29–33.
39. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Times*, 13.
40. In this context, see not only Foucault's technologies of sex, but also Teresa de Lauretis's “technologies of gender,” in her *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).
41. See Brandt, 223, and Alfred Fournier, *Syphilis and Marriage: Lectures Delivered at the St. Louis Hospital, Paris*, trans. Prince A. Morrow (New York: D. Appelton, 1882).
42. In the French text's dedication to Fournier, Brieux wrote: “Monsieur, Je vous demande la permission de vous dédier cette pièce. La plupart des idées qu'elle cherche à vulgariser sont les vôtres.” Eugène Brieux, *Théâtre complet de Brieux* (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1923), 3. This dedication is missing from the American version translated by John Pollock.
43. Brieux, *Three Plays*, 187. Subsequent references are included parenthetically in the text.
44. Brieux's homage is to Philippe Ricord (1800–1889), an influential French syphilologist and mentor to Fournier, Guillaume Dupuytren (1777–1835), a French surgeon and pathologist, and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), a British naturalist who developed a theory of natural selection independently of Darwin.

45. In the French text, George is literally referred to as “l’Avarié,” or the syphilitic.
46. Edwin E. Slosson, “A Dramatist Who Means Something,” *New York Independent* (3 April 1913): 752.
47. Brandt, 12–13. Morrow was also chair of the Committee of Seventeen, which was formed in 1901 to study the problem of VD in New York City. In 1905, Morrow founded the American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis. This group, copied in nineteen other American cities, was formative in shaping the American imagination about prostitution and sexuality. Morrow, who also founded the sex hygiene movement, was dedicated to warning the public about the dangers of venereal disease associated with having sex outside of marriage. Prostitution was one of his primary focal points.
48. This kind of medical detail was graphically featured in the 1914 film version of *Damaged Goods*, in which, according to one review: “The camera even invades the sacred interior of an Institution [an actual VD ward] where it pictured patients suffering from the so-called tertiary stage and brought forth the paralyzed and twisted forms for ‘close-up’ inspection.” (“*Damaged Goods*,” review of *Damaged Goods* [American Film Mfg. Co.], *Variety*, 1 October 1915, 18). Although the film version of *Damaged Goods* (about which see note 107) portrayed syphilis with unprecedented (if not voyeuristic) candor, it reassured anxious audience members that modern medicine and safe-sex practices offered hope for sufferers of the disease.
49. “Excerpts, Opinions, Etc. of *Damaged Goods*,” n.p.
50. Brandt, 9.
51. Prince A. Morrow, *Social Diseases and Marriage: Social Prophylaxis* (New York: Lea Brothers & Co., 1904), iii.
52. Prince A. Morrow, “The Teaching of Sex Hygiene,” *Good Housekeeping* (March 1912): 405.
53. “Prizes of Cash Bring Out Chelsea Section’s Babies,” *New York Times*, 3 August 1912, n.p.
54. William Dean Howells, “The Plays of Eugène Brieux,” *North American Review* (March 1915), 201 and 402–11, quoted in Brenda Murphy, *A Realist in the American Theatre: Selected Drama Criticism of William Dean Howells* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 169.
55. Goldman, 179.
56. Prince A. Morrow, “The Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis of Venereal Diseases,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 44 (March 1905): 675.
57. Edward L. Bernays, “When It Struck Sex O’Clock on Broadway,” *Variety*, undated, *Damaged Goods* clipping file, Museum of the City of New York.
58. Brieux, 186.
59. “Excerpts, Opinions, Etc. of *Damaged Goods*,” n.p.
60. Review of *Damaged Goods*, by Eugène Brieux, as performed by Richard Bennett’s coworkers at the Fulton Theatre, New York, 14 April 1913, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 23 April 1913, 7.
61. Slosson, 752.
62. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Independent*, quoted in review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 19 March 1913, n.p.
63. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York American*, quoted in review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 19 March 1913, n.p. (italics in the original).
64. Undated flier for *Damaged Goods*, NYPLPA.
65. “Excerpts, Opinions, Etc., of *Damaged Goods*,” n.p.
66. Quoted in Brandt, 16.
67. Albert H. Burr, “The Guarantee of Safety in the Marriage Contract,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 47 (8 December 1906): 1887–88.
68. Bernarr MacFadden, *Womanhood and Marriage: Fifty-three Lessons in Sex Hygiene Exclusively for Women* (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Corp., 1918), ix.
69. Henriette’s dramaturgical absence is underscored by her absence in the production photograph keysheets at the Museum for the Performing Arts, which feature other characters in the

play, including several pictures of “the Woman,” but not Henriette. See keysheets online at the New York Public Library’s Web page “Performing Arts in America, 1875–1923,” available at <http://dlc.nypl.org/lpa/nypl/home.html>.

70. For the representation of female madness in nineteenth- and twentieth-century English culture, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

71. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Times*, 13.

72. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 23 April 1913, 7.

73. Benjamin M. Woodbridge, “Eugène Brieux,” *Dial* (17 January 1918): 67.

74. Quoted in “The First Nighter,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 19 March 1913, n.p.

75. H. E. Stearns, “*Damaged Goods*: A Discussion,” *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 26 March 1913, 5.

76. Review of *Damaged Goods*, by Eugène Brieux, as performed by Richard Bennett’s coworkers at the Fulton Theatre, New York, 14 and 17 March 1913, *Life Magazine* (27 March 1913): 628.

77. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Times*, 13.

78. Review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York American*, quoted in review of *Damaged Goods*, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 19 March 1913, n.p.

79. Unidentified promotional flier, NYPLPA.

80. Quoted in *ibid.*

81. Unidentified clipping, NYPLPA.

82. Mrs. Annie Klein, “A Prominent Christian Scientist,” unidentified clipping, NYPLPA.

83. “The Drama as an Instrument of Reform,” *Dial* 58 (1 February 1915): 73.

84. “Defend Social Evil Play,” *New York Times*, 13 October 1913, 9.

85. “Police Stop Two Plays,” *Theatre Magazine* (18 September 1913): 116.

86. Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 40. While I agree with Bell’s analysis of prostitution as a modern construct, I find the four foundational texts she cites as shaping this construction too limited. As this essay demonstrates, many discourses participated in the social construction of the prostitute in the modern imagination. Like Sheila Jeffreys, I remain suspicious of how Bell recuperates the sacred ancient prostitute in her theorization of the postmodern whore’s subject position. See chapter 3 in Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 1997), 65–91.

87. Baudelaire’s “Allegory” appeared in *Les Fleurs du mal* in the summer of 1857. In the poem, Baudelaire describes a prostitute, “a woman of appearance fine / who lets her tresses trail into her wine” [“une femme belle et de riche encolure, / Qui laisse dans son vin traîner sa chevelure”], a figure who is “so necessary to this life” [“nécessaire à la marche du monde”]. Charles Baudelaire, “Allegory,” *Les Fleurs du mal*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: Godine, 1982), 155.

88. Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985): 32–58, at 41.

89. *Ibid.*, 40.

90. *Ibid.*

91. See: Susan Buck-Morss, “The Flâneur, the Sandwichman, and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering,” *New German Critique* 39 (Fall 1986): 99–140, and Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); chap. 1 of Rebecca Schneider’s *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997); chap. 3 in Bell; and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laquer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 220–29.

92. Schneider, 24.

93. *Ibid.* I take “binary terror” from Rebecca Schneider, who takes it in turn from Vivian Patraka.

94. Kneeland’s study of Bedford prostitutes revealed that most prostitutes worked as domestics before they turned to prostitution. See George J. Kneeland, *Commercialized Prostitution in New York City* (1913; reprint, Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 222.

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95. Kitty Warren is, of course, the principal character of George Bernard Shaw's 1898 *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, which premiered in the United States in 1905 and was subsequently shut down on charges of obscenity.

96. Rosen, 35. This Page Law was declared unconstitutional by Justice Bischoff of the New York Court of Appeals in June 1911.

97. Slosson, 752.

98. Brandt, 5.

99. Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1.

100. Quoted in Brandt, 23.

101. Morrow, *Social Diseases and Marriage*, 343.

102. It is this testimonial Boston officials found most offensive (see the review cited in note 105).

103. "Patient Zero" was the name given to a Canadian airline steward who allegedly slept with over two thousand men while knowing he was infected with AIDS. Epidemiologists have subsequently disputed whether Patient Zero ever existed. Theorizing AIDS as if it only had one source (the "magic bullet" theory) was the faulty logic that dominated both AIDS discourse of the 1980s and VD discourse around the time of *Damaged Goods*. For "Patient Zero," see Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Allen White, "Mag Tries to Cash in on AIDS Story," *Bay Area Reporter*, 15 September 1988, 5; chapter 6 of Brandt; and Cindy Patton, *Sex and Germs, the Politics of AIDS* (Boston: South End Press, 1985).

104. Gilman, 248–62.

105. Review of *Damaged Goods*, by Eugène Brieux, as performed by Richard Bennett's coworkers at the Hub Theatre, Boston, 1 December 1913, *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 10 December 1913, 15.

106. Bernays, *Biography of an Idea*, 59.

107. Kevin Brownlow gives the most complete account of Bennett's appearances with the film at American training camps during the war in his *Behind the Mask of Innocence: Sex, Violence, Prejudice, Crime: Films of Social Conscience in the Silent Era* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 60. Most scholars date the film to 1915, but, as Frank Thompson points out, the film was first released in 1914 under the Flying A brand by the American Film Manufacturing Company. See Frank Thompson, *Lost Films: Important Movies That Disappeared* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publication Group, 1996), 27–35. Purchased by Mutual Film Corporation and re-edited, *Damaged Goods* was rereleased in 1915. It was directed by Thomas Ricketts and included Richard Bennett in the title role of George DuPont. While Brownlow (58–61) and Thompson both note that the American version has not survived, the Library of Congress has a copy on file. See Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909–1925* (London: Routledge, 1988), 49–74, and 140–50.

A parody of *Damaged Goods*, called *Damaged, No Goods* and produced by Sunshine Comedies, came out in 1917. See Library of Congress Copyright Office's *Motion Pictures, 1912–1933*, Catalog of Copyright Entries: Cumulative Series (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1951), 170; and Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 86. Other film adaptations of *Damaged Goods* include the British version in 1919 (directed by Alexander Butler), a 1937 Canadian update called *Damaged Lives* (produced by Weldon Pictures Corporation and directed by Edgar G. Ulmer), and a 1938 American version of *Damaged Goods* (produced by Criterion Pictures Corporation and directed by Phil Goldstone), released as *Marriage Forbidden* in the UK. See Brownlow, 60, and Kuhn, 55–72.

108. As with the stage version of Brieux's play, little has been written about the 1914 film adaptation of *Damaged Goods* and its influence in Progressive culture. Allan Brandt (68–69) discusses the play in some detail but curiously neglects the film version, even though he devotes an entire chapter to the film *Fit to Fight*, which he credits to the Commission on Training Camp Activities as the "first venereal disease training film." It is unclear exactly when *Fit to Fight* was released; Kuhn (150) dates it to 1919 and gives the producers as the American Social Hygiene/Public

Health Films, while Brownlow (61) dates *Fit to Fight* to 1917. Possibly, it was used strictly for military purposes from 1917 to 1919 and then released for general audiences (under the title of *Fit to Win*). Whoever is correct, *Damaged Goods* is clearly the earlier VD film, though perhaps not the first one used by the military.

109. William F. Snow and Wilbur A. Sawyer, "Venereal Disease Control in the Army," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 71 (August 1918): 456.

110. Rosen, 33.

111. Gilfoyle, 609.

112. Quoted in Brandt, 67.

113. Quoted in Connelly, 140.

114. Quoted in Brandt, 101.

115. Gilfoyle, 314.