



Sex for Sale: Six Progressive-Era Brothel Dramas (Studies Theatre Hist & Culture)

Katie N. Johnson

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In early twentieth-century U.S. culture, sex sold. While known mainly for its social reforms, the Progressive Era was also obsessed with prostitution, sexuality, and the staging of women's changing roles in the modern era. By the 1910s, plays about prostitution (or "brothel dramas") had inundated Broadway, where they sometimes became long-running hits and other times sparked fiery obscenity debates. In *Sex for Sale*, Katie N. Johnson recovers six of these plays, presenting them with astute cultural analysis, photographs, and production histories. The result is a new history of U.S. theatre that reveals the brothel drama's crucial role in shaping attitudes toward sexuality, birth control, immigration, urbanization, and women's work.

The volume includes the work of major figures including Eugene O'Neill, John Reed, Rachel Crothers, and Elizabeth Robins. Now largely forgotten and some previously unpublished, these plays were among the most celebrated and debated productions of their day. Together, their portrayals of commercialized vice, drug addiction, poverty, white slavery, and interracial desire reveal the Progressive Era's fascination with the underworld and the theatre's power to regulate sexuality. Additional plays, commentary, and teaching materials are available at brotheldrama.lib.miamioh.edu.

Plays included:

Ourselves (1913) by Rachel Crothers

The Web (1913) by Eugene O'Neill

My Little Sister (1913) by Elizabeth Robins

Moondown (1915) by John Reed

Cocaine (1916) by Pendleton King

A Shanghai Cinderella (renamed *East is West*, 1918) by Samuel Shipman and John B. Hymer

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