

Week four – Death of Mary Rogers & Edgar Allen Poe

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Mary Cecilia Rogers was born around 1820 in Lyme, Connecticut (Wikipedia). Being a beautiful young woman and the only child of her widowed mother and living in the boarding house that was run by her mother (Wikipedia).

At seventeen she got a job as a clerk in a tobacco shop on Liberty Street owned by John Anderson in New York City (Serratore, 2013). The shop was no different from dozens of other tobacco shops in New York City (Serratore, 2013). She was paid a generous wage earning more than common wages (Tilistra, 2017) because of her physical attractiveness which brought in many customers (Wikipedia). Mary worked behind the counter purely to allure gentleman customers (Atlas). The store business exploded after she started (Bowery Boys). The tobacco shop was in a prime location that brought in many gentlemen into the shop (Bowery Boys). One customer wrote that he spent an entire afternoon at the store only to exchange "teasing glances" (Wikipedia). One admirer published a poem in the New York Herald referring to her heaven-like smile and her star-like eyes (Wikipedia). This generated and achieved a curious of being a celebrity. Being perhaps the first women of New York City to be famous for being talked about (Tilistra, 2017).

She became known as the "Beautiful Cigar Girl" (Tilistra, 2017). Mary became well known for her beauty that customers would travel to the tobacco shop just to see the beautiful cigar girl working behind the counter (Tilistra, 2017). She served famous individuals like Edgar Allan Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving and many influential gentlemen of New York City (Untold History Revealed, 2016).

In 1838 Mary mysteriously disappeared for two weeks without telling anyone. The tobacco shop business quickly declined after people did not see Mary. The penny press which was very popular at this time covered Mary's disappearance as a mystery. This resulted in a major increase in circulation (Untold History Revealed, 2016). Mary returned stating and not happy with the press said she simply was visiting a friend in Brooklyn (Serratore, 2013). The penny press "The Sun", who had been responsible for the "Great Moon Hoax" was accused of making up the story of her disappearance to sell newspapers (Serratore, 2013). With Mary returning the shop was busier than ever (Serratore, 2013).

The Penny press of this time was most noted for its price of only one cent per paper. The

exceptionally low price popularized the newspaper with the poorer classes (Wikipedia). Editors quickly realized that the information that interested the penny paying public that they enjoyed the information about police, crime, gossip, and criminal cases. The main revenue for the penny press was advertising not the income from the paper, so they offered it at this reduced price compared to other papers costing six to eight cents (Wikipedia).

The penny papers represented the crudest form of journalism because of the sensational gossip including murder, crime, tragedy, and adventure (Wikipedia).

On July 28, 1841, Mary Rogers was found dead in Hoboken, New Jersey (Serratore, 2013). This became an American murder victim story which quickly became a national sensation (Wikipedia). When her body was found in the Hudson River it was assumed to have been the victim of gang violence. A witness swore that she was dumped after a failed abortion attempt, and her boyfriend's suicide note suggested possible involvement on his part (Wikipedia). The story, over publicized by the press, also emphasized the ineptitude and corruption of the city's law enforcement (Wikipedia). Paper sells fast with stories about a dead girl being murdered and being violated ((Bowery Boys). A popular theory was that Mary Rogers was a victim of gang violence. Interest in the story continued for nine weeks until a new story of an unrelated murder case of John C. Colt's murder of Samuel Adams (Wikipedia).

Mary Rogers' story was fictionalized most notably by Edgar Allan Poe as an action story "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (Homberger, p.86). The story was relocated to Paris, names changed, and the victim's body was found in the River Seine in France (Wikipedia). Some considered this as the first modern detective story. The story included the main character unraveling the mystery of Marie's assassination. Edgar Allan Poe states that he entered into a very rigorous analysis of the real tragedy in New York City hinting at the death of Mary Rogers and hoping to solve the case (Wikipedia).

The combination of many factors all based on the death of Mary Rogers contributed to the general public's fear and dangers of New York City. The Penny Press weeks of gossip on the missing Mary Rogers and again with her death. The graphic supposed details of the gang rape. The Penny Press also printing many concerns with the New York City incompetence and corruption of the city's law enforcement (Wikipedia). Finally, the works of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Roget" even after changing names and places the general public knew it was based on the unsolved mystery of Mary Rogers murder.

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