



# Working Women, Literary Ladies: The Industrial Revolution and Female Aspiration

*Sylvia J. Cook*

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Working Women, Literary Ladies explores the simultaneous entry of working-class women in the United States into wage-earning factory labor and into opportunities for mental and literary development. It is the first book to examine the fascinating exchange between the work and literary spheres for laboring women in the rapidly industrializing America of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As women entered the public sphere as workers, their opportunities for intellectual growth expanded, even as those same opportunities were often tightly circumscribed by the factory owners who were providing them. These developments, both institutional and personal, opened up a range of new possibilities for working-class women that profoundly affected women of all classes and the larger social fabric. Cook examines the extraordinary and diverse literary productions of these working women, ranging from their first New England magazine of belles lettres, The Lowell Offering, to Emma Goldman's periodical, Mother Earth; from Lucy Larcom's epic poem of female factory life, An Idyl of Work, to Theresa Malkiel's fictional account of sweatshop workers in New York, The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker. This vital new book traces the hopes and tensions generated by the expectations of working-class women as they created a wholly new way of being alive in the world.

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