

**STUDYING FEMALE PROSTITUTION IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LONDON:
AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS**

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Melissa Dawn Munro, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in History, has presented a thesis titled, ***Studying Female Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century London: An Historiographical Analysis***, in an oral examination held on October 26, 2012. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

Prostitution has become an increasingly popular topic within the field of history, due largely to a growing interest in resurrecting the lives and voices of those who were never able to leave their own records. This has become known as social history, or “history from the bottom up,” in which individuals such as peasants, workers, women, and racial minorities take center focus. Subjects such as the prostitute are also ideal candidates for its study, as they were usually female and of extremely low social status. Though these individuals left very few records of their own, they were the subject of many writings by others, primarily in the form of pamphlets, which were often produced for political, moralistic, or entertainment purposes. Such sources are valuable to the study of eighteenth-century prostitution, though they must be examined carefully, keeping in mind the various undertones they possess.

Due to the available source material on prostitution characteristic of the period, the eighteenth century has been an especially rewarding area in which to examine the history of prostitution. Many historians have focused on this topic, and it is three of their works which this paper will examine: Tony Henderson’s *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (1999), Sophie Carter’s *Purchasing Power: Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture* (2004) and Laura J. Rosenthal’s *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (2006). When considering the study of such a complex topic, many questions arise, such as: how have historians overcome the difficulties inherent to the topic, what kinds of sources are employed in its study,

which sources prove to be the most valuable, and what have historians discovered through their efforts? Upon systematically examining the sources and methods used by each of these three authors, I will attempt to answer such questions as well as establish an understanding of historians' efforts to study the complex topic of prostitution in eighteenth-century London.

As will become clear, the uniqueness of these three authors' sources – legal, visual, and fictional materials, rather than the more typical pamphlet literature – and their willingness to apply less traditional methods of analysis have allowed them to enrich current understandings of eighteenth-century prostitution. Though these authors approach the topic in distinctive ways, they are simultaneously working towards a common goal of locating the prostitute within the wider social framework of the eighteenth century – a relatively recent development in the study of the topic. By reaching toward this goal they are also suggesting that, despite traditional understandings of eighteenth-century “libertinism,” prostitution was much more than just an accepted feature of a frivolous society – rather, it became a source of extreme anxiety and functioned as a valuable cultural metaphor in making sense of wider social concerns. The willingness of these three authors to approach the study of eighteenth-century prostitution with innovation and open-mindedness ensures that the topic can continue to develop and its intricacies can be better comprehended, and through a combination of original scholarship and cooperative understanding history can succeed as a collective enterprise.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

The study of prostitution has become an increasingly intriguing topic in contemporary culture, due in part to growing interest in fields such as women's and gender studies, social history, and sexuality. This growing interest has been reflected in the changing nature of the field of history, especially within the last century. Beginning in the 1960s, social changes such as increased class, gender and racial equality inspired a shift in attention towards individuals who had previously been overlooked, both by society and by historians.¹ This revolutionized the questions which were being asked by historians and, as new ones came to the forefront, they transformed the nature of historical enquiry and new fields of history – such as social, women's and gender, and post-colonial history – developed.

As the subjects which were of interest within these new areas possessed an elusiveness that made it difficult to study them in traditional ways, the progress of the field of history was paralleled by a slow abandonment of outmoded methods, such as the traditional narrative, and their replacement with innovative ones.² It was essential for social historians in particular to exercise their creativity, inspiring them to adopt techniques from other disciplines such as anthropology, ethnography, and psychology as well as utilize more

¹Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9; Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1; Karen Newman states that recovery of the histories of those who weren't able to leave their own records has been termed "becoming visible." Karen Newman, *Cultural Capitals: Early Modern London and Paris* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 134.

²Before social history, subjects who were not "Great Men," such as prostitutes, women, members of the lower classes, and racial minorities, were not yet regarded as significant to the historical record and were thus largely left out of it. Instead, historical scholarship was structured in a narrative fashion which focused primarily on individual figures (usually male) and dates deemed central to understanding the past.

unconventional types of sources. These sources included literature such as novels, plays, and poetry, popular sources such as religious sermons and pamphlets, personal documents such as diaries and wills, and legal documents of the church and government such as marriage and death records, court records and town censuses.

An area in which an innovative approach is especially necessary is that of prostitution. The study of this topic is beset with difficulties inherent to its nature, as prostitutes, having been primarily female and of low social status, left few records, while those which were left are often laden with political, moral and satirical overtones. These overtones are especially prominent in the pamphlet literature which abounded in the eighteenth century. This literature was produced for the purpose of examining and discussing current social issues, individual pamphlets often taking on various tones of morality, lasciviousness, or political nuance depending on the intentions of their author. Many pamphlets were written in response to others, often sparking long and multi-faceted pamphlet wars. Pamphlets have been the most commonly-used source for the study of prostitution of this period due to two main factors: their inherent usefulness as social barometers, and their wide availability to historians due to the fact that they were published in large volumes during this time period. As a result, many studies on the topic are focused primarily on social attitudes toward prostitution, thus lacking in areas such as the experience of prostitutes and the structure of prostitution within wider society.

In order to overcome such limitations, the study of prostitution in particular has benefited from recent historical trends that involve the use of a broader range of sources and new methods of interpreting them. These developments

have allowed previously unknown information to come to light and have altered the focus on and estimation of significant pieces of our past. For example, due to the growing popularity of the topic and the increasing willingness of historians to expand their resources in order to overcome the limitations which plagued older scholarship, current historians are succeeding in documenting more detail in regards to the daily lives of prostitutes and the structure of prostitution within the wider cultural framework. This is in stark contrast to older scholarship which focused on contemporaries' efforts to control and eliminate prostitution, almost exclusively utilizing published primary and secondary sources.³ Due to their nature, studies such as this marginalized prostitutes, while, in contrast, current study seeks to "rescue prostitution from the literature of deviancy and crime" and "integrate [prostitutes] into the larger historical narrative."⁴ Though many historians still employ these more traditional sources, the focus continues to move away from a consideration of the prostitute as a social deviant existing on the fringes of society and towards an understanding of their experience and place within society. It is precisely these prevailing attempts at understanding eighteenth-century prostitution and overcoming its inherent difficulties which will be the focus of this paper.

A historiographical analysis of prostitution not only raises questions of how historians have overcome the limitations posed by the topic, but also of how successful their various techniques have proven and how they have revised the history of prostitution. In my mission to answer these questions, I will examine three important works which study eighteenth-century prostitution, providing an

³Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (London: Longman, 1999), 11.

⁴Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "Archaeologists in the Brothel: 'Sin City,' Historical Archaeology and Prostitution," *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2005), 133, 139.

in-depth analysis of the techniques employed with respect to their use of sources. The first is Tony Henderson's *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, which examines legal records; the second, Sophie Carter's *Purchasing Power: Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture*, which assesses the visual elements of print culture; and, thirdly, Laura J. Rosenthal's *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, which provides an in-depth analysis of contemporary novels.⁵

As evidenced by their titles, all three of these works deal with eighteenth-century prostitution in England, and, as evidenced by their content, focus primarily on London. As such, I will begin by providing a background to prostitution in eighteenth-century London, opening with an examination of its medieval counterpart and the various factors which led to its very different existence in the early modern period. I will then briefly discuss each of the authors' works, followed by a lengthier analysis of their respective techniques in regards to their specific source material. The former is for the purpose of establishing a basic understanding of the focus, content and source material of each work so that the latter can be approached with a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter.

⁵Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (London: Longman, 1999); Sophie Carter, *Purchasing Power: Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004); Laura J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). The final two chapters (six and seven) of Rosenthal's work, entitled "Tom Jones and the New Vice" and "Risky Business in the South Seas and Back" will not be examined in this paper, as the former deals with male prostitution, and the latter with prostitution during South Sea exploration – both of which are topics beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, Rosenthal's work studies various forms of eighteenth-century print other than novels, though as they are her most innovative sources, they will be of primary focus in this paper.

My analysis will consist of a thematic examination of each of the three authors and the sources they use – legal, visual and narrative– providing an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of each in the attempt to reconstruct eighteenth-century prostitution. Though historians have studied the existence of prostitution in various historical settings, I have chosen the eighteenth century due to the vast amount of scholarship which exists. This is due largely to the availability of primary sources, resulting from a cultural inclination toward active enquiry and its documentation in print form. This provides ample opportunity for the goals of this paper, though I have been careful to select works which possess both uniqueness as well as convention in their use of sources – the former for purposes of originality, and the latter to ensure viability.⁶ It is with this analysis that an understanding of the study of prostitution can be gained, as well as a knowledge regarding the importance for historians to remain open-minded in their study of prostitution. As historians such as Henderson, Carter, and Rosenthal expand their methods to include the use of unique sources – such as the visual, fictional and legal – and adopt techniques from other disciplines such as art history and literary studies, understandings of the history of prostitution can be enriched and the eighteenth-century prostitute can begin to “become visible.”

⁶Other works considered for inclusion in this analysis were: Melissa Mowry, *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660-1714: Political Pornography and Prostitution* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), Bradford K. Mudge, *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel, 1684-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), and Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1987). However, as many of these works use prostitution as only one element of broader political, social, or cultural themes, I decided they would not entirely suit my purposes. In addition, as the authors' use of sources was important to my goals, I felt that the works of Henderson, Carter, and Rosenthal would be most helpful due to their comparatively exclusive use of three varied types of primary sources.

Chapter 2:

Prostitution in London from the Medieval Period to the Eighteenth Century

Throughout history, prostitution has been an omnipresent feature of countless cultures and societies, even being colloquially termed “the world’s oldest profession” by many, scholars and laymen alike.¹ The expression conveys the ubiquity of prostitution, insinuating that its presence within human culture is an inevitability, regardless of whether it manifests itself in the bordellos of ancient Rome, the harems of the Middle East, the okiyas of Japan, the bedrooms of Charles II of England or Louis XV of France, the streets of Victorian London, or the brothels of modern-day Nevada. While it is ubiquitous, it is also complex; there are many levels and facets intrinsic to prostitution apart from the socially constructed separation between street-walkers and brothel-workers, courtesans and royal mistresses. There have been cheap prostitutes and expensive prostitutes, pretty ones and ugly ones, young and old, temporary opportunists and permanent professionals, and, in the vein of eighteenth-century thought, sinners, victims, and survivors. Thus, the study of prostitution provides historians with a unique opportunity to compare and contrast, as it is pervasive within human society but has manifested itself in a variety of forms.

Despite the seemingly universal nature of prostitution, many historians have claimed that, actually, prostitution is linked more exclusively to modernity and the development of urban society.² This is likely due to the fact that the growth of cities leads to an increasingly individualistic lifestyle, in contrast to the

¹Undeniably, this expression has proliferated in both academic as well as popular culture. Examples of its use in book titles include *Whore Stories: A Revealing History of the World’s Oldest Profession* by Tyler Stoddard Smith (Avon, Massachusetts: Adams Media, 2012) and *An Anthropological Perspective on Prostitution: The World’s Oldest Profession* by Patricia Whelehan (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

²Newman, 135. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14.

traditional family unit, in which one is responsible for one's own survival, must compete for work within a greater population, and possesses a measure of anonymity lacking in small rural communities.³ Thus, it is unsurprising that with the advent of the early modern period, a period characterized by urban living and social, political and religious upheaval, prostitution became an increasingly prominent feature of society, subject to extreme instabilities and sparking much scrutiny and debate.⁴

In order to understand prostitution in the early modern period, a comparison with the medieval period and a discussion of the changes brought on by the Reformation is useful. Over the course of the medieval period the legal status of prostitution fluctuated between being accepted and being outlawed, and could differ between towns, as each was responsible for the formation of many of their own laws.⁵ Early Christian leaders such as Roman Emperor Constantine laid the groundwork for later medieval thought towards prostitution by treating prostitutes with "benign contempt" rather than outward prohibition and establishing official red-light districts within Constantinople.⁶ In the west, Augustine wrote that, though prostitution was an evil, it was a necessary one without which social structures would collapse.⁷ Its necessity lay in the idea that it prevented greater evils such as rape, seduction, and sodomy by functioning as an outlet for the uncontrollable male sexual appetite. In this way, the protection of

³Karras, 14. James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 211.

⁴Though he is referring to the medieval period, Nicholas Orme states that in the countryside, extra-marital sex remained casual and unorganized, while in the city it developed into an organized trade comparable to those of traditional crafts or industries. It is thus conceivable that with increasing urbanisation came an increasing outlet for prostitution. Nicholas Orme, "The Reformation and the Red Light," *History Today*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (March, 1987), 38.

⁵Karras, 15.

⁶Brundage, 105.

⁷Orme, 37.

respectable women was ensured and social order was maintained, while those who transgressed the boundaries of social decency by engaging in prostitution were conveniently confined to particular areas and kept under the control of authorities.⁸

Though the practice of implementing state-run red-light districts was more typical of the continent, there were three notable areas within England which allowed institutionalized brothels: the urban centers of Sandwich in Kent and Southampton in Hampshire, both port towns, and Southwark, a London suburb located across the Thames.⁹ Though the frequent influx of sailors can account for the development of an organized system of brothels in the two port towns, their institutionalization within Southwark was due to the fact that they had long existed there, functioning outside of the official city walls, sometimes on lands still under control of the City authorities and sometimes on the privately-owned lands of high-ranking churchmen.¹⁰

In addition to their social purposes, the economic benefits of prostitution also encouraged toleration, as brothels essentially functioned as sites of

⁸This is a fundamental cultural attitude toward women present throughout western history. Women were seen as weak versions of men – physically, mentally, emotionally, and morally – and such views were perpetuated through various outlets including medicine, theology and entertainment. Due to these weaknesses, women were kept under the control and supervision of men – legally, their fathers, brothers, masters, or, ideally, husbands – lest they become unruly. As a result, a dichotomous viewpoint on women emerged, in which a woman was either obedient and proper or defiant and indecent. Prostitutes, unsurprisingly, were prime examples of the latter and thus were best kept under control by authorities lest they poison other members of society. Anna Clark, “Female Sexuality,” in *The Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700*, ed. Deborah Simonton (London: Routledge, 2007), 54; D.E. Underdown, “The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-117; Wiesner-Hanks, 18; Henderson, 83; John Knox, “First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,” in *British Pamphleteers, Volume One: From the Sixteenth Century to the French Revolution*, ed. George Orwell and Reginald Reynolds (London: Allan Wingate, 1948), 21-22.

⁹Karras, 35.

¹⁰Ibid., 38.

consumption, facilitating “the trade in luxuries” by offering patrons commodities such as food and wine in addition to sex.¹¹ Those who ran the brothels often spent vast amounts of money on furnishings and decoration, and the women employed in them attempted to display their wealth and enhance their desirability by wearing luxurious clothing and jewellery.¹² In addition, the existence of brothels served the simple economic purpose of providing many individuals with jobs, including prostitutes, bawds, procurers (those who attempted to recruit new women for the brothels), and pimps (those who found willing patrons and directed them to the brothels), many of whom made a decent living and some of whom made a very profitable living.¹³ As well, the authorities who taxed brothels and the churchmen who owned the land on which the brothels existed also enjoyed financial benefit.

Inevitably, as prostitution came to be considered a “civic industry,” those involved in it were subject to certain laws and regulations.¹⁴ In Southwark, these included the requirement to close brothels on holy days and restrictions on the amount of money that bawds could charge prostitutes for rent.¹⁵ In addition, they were required to identify their establishments by whitewashing the exteriors and painting the signage on the front wall rather than using wooden signs overhanging the street as most other businesses did.¹⁶ Prostitutes were also required to differentiate themselves from the more respectable members of the population by obeying sumptuary laws which regulated the appearance of their

¹¹Henderson, 78.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Paul Griffiths, “The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London,” *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1993), 47.

¹⁴Brundage, 527.

¹⁵Karras, 38; Orme, 36; “Bawd” was the common title for brothel-owners throughout the medieval and early modern periods and was used almost exclusively in reference to women.

¹⁶Roy Porter, *Social History of London* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), 56.

clothing and hair, such as a restriction on the wearing of silk and miniver, a luxurious squirrel fur.¹⁷ While such regulations applied to prostitutes who were officially segregated and controlled, it was more difficult to police those who attempted to practice within the confines of the City, whether in unsanctioned brothels or on the streets. As repeated attempts were made, at least as early as 1277, to rid the city of prostitutes by banishing them to beyond the city walls, those who continued to practice within them were subject to a different, harsher set of laws than those participating in the institutionalized brothels of Southwark.¹⁸ However, such attempts to regulate prostitution frequently proved ineffective, as had always been and would continue to be the case.¹⁹

While the social and economic benefits of prostitution persisted through the medieval period and into the early modern era, the advent of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century signalled a widespread change in social attitudes towards sexual morality and prostitution.²⁰ The views of Martin Luther – which stemmed from both his religious principles and his social expectations – help to illustrate this change. In religious terms, he felt that prostitution and the loose morality that it encouraged was in direct opposition to the wishes of God, and therefore should not exist for any earthly reason.²¹ This included the apparently uncontrollable male sexual appetite, which he believed was inflamed by the existence of prostitution, rather than controlled, as medieval theologians had believed.²² Instead of blaming seductive females for male transgressions, Luther advocated a restructuring of traditional gender roles in which men claimed

¹⁷Orme, 38; Henderson, 78.

¹⁸Karras, 15.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 37.

²¹Lindberg, 361.

²²Ibid., 366; Bullough, 141.

responsibility for their own actions and lived in accordance with social responsibilities rather than acting on personal impulses.²³

In addition to the impact of Luther's theological and social ideas, the epidemic outbreak of syphilis in the late fifteenth century bred intense fear and anxiety amongst the population of Europe, and, as it was quickly established as a sexually transmitted disease, it further facilitated opposition towards prostitution.²⁴ This was a disease new to Europe, taking the population completely by surprise as it seemed to appear out of nowhere, spread rapidly, and was characterized by horrific symptoms such as masses of unsightly pustules and the rotting away of flesh and bone.²⁵ The intense cultural anxiety incited by the disease's sudden appearance and the seriousness of its symptoms and communicability encouraged the negative attitudes towards prostitution which were fermenting due to the Reformation. Though complete eradication of prostitution would never be successful due to its inherent ubiquity in society, the arrival of syphilis had an important impact on the increasing attempts at regulation and elimination which became characteristic of the early modern period.

In spite of such attempts at control, prostitution remained an ever-present thread in the rich tapestry that was London throughout the entirety of the

²³Lindberg, 365-366. This was in direct opposition to traditional attitudes toward gender expectations in which women were held responsible for sexual transgressions. This was due to the idea that sexual immorality on the part of a female was "a heinous fault," but was "relatively trivial" for the male. Bernard Capp, "The Double Standard Revisited: Plebeian Women and Male Sexual Reputation in Early Modern England," *Past & Present*, No. 162 (Feb., 1999), 70.

²⁴At its outbreak, syphilis was termed the "Great Pox," highlighting its severity, as well as the "French Disease" or the "Italian Disease," highlighting the uncertainty as to its origins and the xenophobic tendency to blame others for its inception. Not until the eighteenth century, inspired by a sixteenth-century poem about a shepherd named Syphilis who contracted the disease, was it called such. Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67-68.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 67-68.

period.²⁶ The city provided an especially fertile environment for the proliferation of prostitution due to various factors such as its population growth, its physical growth, and its promotion of commercialism and capitalism.²⁷ Beginning in the sixteenth century, London saw rapid population expansion, multiplying sevenfold in 250 years, from around 100,000 in 1500 to nearly 700,000 by 1750, nearly 10 percent of the population of England and Wales.²⁸ This phenomenon bred less-than-desirable living conditions for many Londoners, especially those from the lower classes. These individuals, many of them immigrants from the country seeking a better and more exciting life, were often forced to live in the squalor of the suburbs that were continuing to expand beyond the established walls of the city.²⁹

These wards – most famously Southwark, which lay on the opposite side of the Thames – were outside of the jurisdiction of city officials, and thus became breeding grounds for undesirable and downright criminal activity.³⁰ Such undesirable features included playhouses and bull- and bear-baiting rings, as well as the infamous bawdy-houses.³¹ Despite attempts during the Reformation to eradicate the latter, they remained in operation due to the difficulties inherent in the persecution of prostitution, their legal status ever-changing though always ambiguous throughout the period. However, in contrast to the medieval era,

²⁶Griffiths, 54.

²⁷The factors contributing to the proliferation of prostitution are complex, being innumerable and incredibly intricate. For the purposes of this paper, those factors mentioned are intended as a brief introduction into the nature of early modern prostitution, though with the knowledge that they provide only a partial explanation.

²⁸Michael Anderson, "The Social Implications of Demographic Change," in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, Vol. 2: People and Their Environment, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 5.

²⁹Porter, 133.

³⁰J.A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550-1760* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45.

³¹Orme, 36.

attitudes toward these establishments became much less tolerant and regular attempts were made to close them and incarcerate and rehabilitate those who worked in them. The first formal example of this occurred in 1546, when Henry VIII of England, inspired by the ideological changes sweeping the nation, closed the licensed brothels of London and deemed prostitution illegal.³² Those convicted of bawdry and prostitution were incarcerated in the many prisons dotting Southwark, most notably the infamous Bridewell Prison, and bawdy-houses were identified by the authorities and often subsequently demolished or converted into factories.³³ Despite such attempts to control prostitution, it endured, especially across the river outside the boundaries of the City, experiencing intermittent periods of toleration and outright illegality, especially under the Tudors. After Henry VIII's death the brothels were reopened by his son, Edward VI, subsequently closed upon the reign of his first daughter, Mary I, and then reopened again by his second daughter, Elizabeth I.³⁴

Such vicissitudes continued through the politically volatile seventeenth century as well, and by the eighteenth century prostitution was technically illegal once again. Historians studying this period often refer to it as the "long eighteenth century," as they define it through significant events rather than actual dates. Thus, the "long eighteenth century" commonly begins with the Restoration in 1660, at least for the purposes of social historians, and ends with the conclusion of the Georgian period in 1830.³⁵ The Restoration era came to be characterized

³²Ibid., 41.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Porter, 56.

³⁵This applies to the works which form the basis of this study as well. While Carter remains focused on the eighteenth century proper, the time period under examination in Rosenthal's work begins with the Restoration (1660), while Henderson's spans to 1830. For these reasons, the "long eighteenth century" will be utilized for the purposes of this paper. Gwen Brewer and Vern

by its libertinism, a term describing the pursuit of pleasure and the air of sexual abandon which occurred in the wake of the extreme religious and moral fervour of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁶ This was especially apparent at court and in polite society, where, for example, the taking of mistresses became increasingly common, though the atmosphere quickly became a more general cultural phenomenon. Libertinism was perpetuated especially through its representation in popular print form, commonly called 'cheap print' by historians, which was accessible to all social levels.³⁷ A prominent theme of this print, usually in the form of pamphlets or broadsides, was prostitution. This led to its designation as "pornography," a term derived from the Greek for "writings about prostitutes."³⁸ With the eighteenth century the "first great age of pornography in English" occurred, and its portrayal in popular print culture evolved as an important medium for various social, cultural and political issues.³⁹

Despite the seemingly flagrant air of libertinism, the cultural phenomenon nonetheless faced much opposition from various facets of society. In response to the perceived erosion of society's morality, a reformation of manners campaign began, quickly growing in numbers and in authority. The Society for the Reformation of Manners and its various sister groups encouraged moral and spiritual reform through a broad range of methods, including private prayer, parliamentary legislation, and public vigilantism, and eventually narrowed their focus to sexual immorality in particular. They became almost solely concerned with eradication of the very public and socially detrimental institution of

Bullough, "Women, Pornography, and Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Sexuality & Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter, 2005), 15.

³⁶Clark, 59; Bullough, 157.

³⁷Fissell, 7.

³⁸Brewer, 14.

³⁹Clark, 62; Mowry, 2.

prostitution and the associated bawdy-houses. They were, at first, encouraged by the monarchy and the government and were successful in orchestrating thousands of arrests and closing a number of brothels, but eventually fell into disfavour, largely due to their extreme methods. They were inclined to harassing and seizing suspected prostitutes in the street for the purpose of turning them over to the authorities, and, as a result of their zeal, were often verbally and even physically opposed by passersby. By the 1730s these societies were in rapid decline, making way for later societies which fostered a philosophy of reform rather than eradication. These societies believed in helping prostitutes and at-risk girls and did so by establishing hospitals which gave them a religious education and taught them to perform manual labour, all with the purpose of cleansing the soul and providing a skill set for re-entry into society.⁴⁰

However, due to prostitution's clandestine nature, authorities had great difficulty in pinpointing it and condemning offenders. As a result, most prostitutes were convicted for petty crime related to prostitution rather than for prostitution itself. Such crimes included pick pocketing, theft, and assault, usually brought to the courts by prostitutes' clients. Another form of conviction was that of running a bawdy-house, as this was infinitely less problematic to identify. Many members of society were unsatisfied with attempts by the law to curb prostitution, leading to the formation of the vigilante Reform Societies discussed above and the strengthening of many forms of legislation. This included Watch Acts, which gave increased authority to parish and ward watchmen and their superiors, Disorderly Houses Acts, which made it obligatory for a parish to fund prosecutions of

⁴⁰Faramerz Dabhoiwala, "Sex and Societies for Moral Reform, 1688-1800," *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April, 2007), 290, 313; Karen Sonnelitter, "The Reformation of Manners Societies, the Monarchy, and the English State, 1696-1714," *The Historian*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Fall, 2010), 529, 541; Rosenthal, 44-48; Henderson, 86-89, 187.

brothels by parishioners, and Vagrancy Acts which made it legal for JPs to issue search warrants without the urging of civilians.⁴¹ Eventually such searches were required at least four times a year.⁴² By 1751, an act was issued which declared that all places of public entertainment required a licence, and failure to attain one and display it prominently gave constables the right to enter and arrest anyone within.⁴³ Though various acts were issued throughout the eighteenth century, prostitution remained complicated, time-consuming and expensive to prosecute, and thus continued to slip through the cracks on many occasions.

As much prostitution occurred outside of the brothel, a vital element of its policing was focused on the streets.⁴⁴ This responsibility fell to the members of watch committees, such as constables, beadles, patrols, and night watchmen. The night watchmen were undoubtedly important to the policing of prostitution, as they greatly outnumbered the other members of the watch and were expected to patrol the streets regularly throughout the night. Over the course of the century various Watch Acts were implemented, intermittently changing the specifics of policing, though the concern remained on breaking up loitering and apprehending those who were disturbing the peace or were suspected of prostitution or other forms of crime. After such an apprehension, the perpetrator was kept in the watch house overnight, upon which time they were brought before the JP for presentment of charges. Despite their efforts, many complaints were laid against

⁴¹Henderson, 92.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 94.

⁴⁴These women would ply their trade on the streets rather than in a brothel, and were responsible for procuring their own clients. Usually the sexual transaction would take place in a room at a lodging house, which might have been hired for the duration of the act or rented long-term by the prostitute as a reception room for her clients, in a *bagnio*, a form of public bath, in a back room offered by various public houses ("pubs"), or simply in a dark corner of a street, alley or park. Ibid., 31-33.

the watchmen, as they frequently turned a blind eye or even released perpetrators before laying charges. This is suspected, by Henderson for example, to be due in part to the difficulty in arresting prostitutes as they frequently resorted to physical violence or were aided in doing so by their peers.⁴⁵ As prostitutes were inclined to do as they pleased regardless of the watchmen, it often happened that the watchmen simply ignored their transgressions or, in some cases, even befriended them. In instances where the woman had been released from the watch house before charges were laid, it was commonly due to the inconvenience and expense related to prosecution or the personal decisions of the constables.⁴⁶

If a prostitute was successfully arrested and prosecuted she was transferred to either the Mansion House or the Guildhall Justice Room, the two courthouses of London.⁴⁷ A verdict was then passed by the Lord Mayor or the presiding Alderman, respectively, most commonly discharging the accused if they were young or first-time offenders who promised to reform, committing them to a hospital if they were diseased, or sentencing them to Bridewell prison, most commonly for a month, if they were deemed sufficiently guilty.⁴⁸

Despite these instances of success in policing prostitution, the trade remained difficult to regulate throughout the century. This fact, paired with increasing cultural anxiety regarding the “impending breakdown of society,” inspired in part by the growth of capitalism, commercialism and libertinism, incited amplified concern toward the threats posed by prostitution.⁴⁹ As Anna

⁴⁵Ibid., 112.

⁴⁶Ibid., 109-115, 130.

⁴⁷Ibid., 130.

⁴⁸Ibid., 134-135.

⁴⁹Underdown, 116.

Clark claims, female sexual transgression represented by the figure of the immoral woman often becomes a metaphor for social and political disorder.⁵⁰ London was becoming a city as we would define it today, with a rising population and an increasingly intricate system of commerce and business, and with this came the parallel commercialization of prostitution.⁵¹ Gone were the days when prostitution was an unorganized and opportunistic endeavour, and beginning was an era in which it would become an increasingly structured and professional industry. Though prostitution usually remained ambiguously illegal, its professionalization and the increasing ease with which it could be identified and defined would provoke intensifying social, moral and legal concern and action by the authorities and the wider society. This can be demonstrated by the period's plethora of legal, moral, satirical, literary, and personal sources regarding the lives of the prostitutes and the attempts by society and the law to incarcerate and reform them.

The early modern period signalled the advent of an especially complex and multifaceted time – socially, politically, economically, and culturally – and this had especially notable consequences for the practice of prostitution. Though the medieval period was characterized by toleration towards prostitution, deeming it a necessary evil, the early modern period was affected by theological and cultural changes which impacted the social conception and acceptance of prostitution in London. Despite the growing opposition to it, and the frequent attempts to eradicate it, prostitution flourished, as conditions unique to London, such as the population rise, the growth of the city into new and largely

⁵⁰Clark, 54.

⁵¹Newman, 135; It is argued, also, by many historians such as Randolph Trumbach, Tony Henderson, Judy Walkowitz, and Laura J. Rosenthal, that prostitution “took on its modern form” in this period. Rosenthal, 4.

unmanaged districts, and increasing commercialization, were ideal for enabling it. Thus, paradoxically, prostitution grew in practice and availability but was at the same time increasingly prosecuted through laws and action on the part of the authorities. As a result, the study of prostitution in early modern London provides historians with an immensely complex and fascinating subject, and, thanks to the inspiration of early modern contemporaries to endlessly comment on, moralize, and debate the issue, the topic offers a vast and stimulating body of material to study in its regard.

Chapter 3:

Introduction to the Scholarship of Henderson, Carter, and Rosenthal

Many recent historians have chosen to focus their talents toward the study of prostitution in eighteenth-century London. All three elements of such a topic – prostitution, London, and the eighteenth century – render for study an area which is both complex and stimulating.¹ Despite the wealth of knowledge available for this topic, locating prostitution within any historical setting has often posed a challenge for historians, primarily due to the fact that prostitutes rarely left sources, excepting legal records or dubious “true” accounts of their lives. Sources such as these, along with popular print material such as moral, political, or satirical tracts, are plagued with undertones and subject to agendas which make it difficult to determine their accuracy and extract the true voice of the subject. In spite of such limitations, these are the sources which many historians use in their quest to study prostitution. It is this endeavour which I will seek to investigate, through an examination of historians’ use of various types of sources and employment of innovative methods to uncover the obscurities of eighteenth-century prostitution.

Three such historians form the basis of this study. The first historian is Tony Henderson, whose 1999 work entitled *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* relies primarily on legal records in an attempt to reconstruct the experiences of prostitution in eighteenth-century London, both by the prostitutes themselves as well as by members of greater society. The second historian is Sophie Carter,

¹Many historians would and have attested to such a claim. For example, in his 2005 article entitled “Archaeologists in the Brothel: ‘Sin City,’ Historical Archaeology and Prostitution,” Timothy J. Gilfoyle refers to the history of prostitution as “a hot topic.” He states that the “fascination with prostitution now extends deep into the academy ... [and] the study of sexuality is currently one of the most dynamic fields, [of which] prostitution is a central topic.” Gilfoyle, 133.

whose book *Purchasing Power: Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture*, published in 2004, examines visual representations of prostitution as portrayed in popular print of the eighteenth century in order to understand greater social attitudes toward prostitution at this time. The third and final author is Laura J. Rosenthal, whose 2006 work, entitled *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* surveys written texts, focusing in detail on several significant novels of the century and supplementing them with an array of written pamphlet sources. It is through these that she gains an understanding of shifting social attitudes towards prostitution and prostitutes as the century progressed, tying this shift to the emergence of modernism, capitalism, and the commercial marketplace. Each of the three authors examines eighteenth-century prostitution with a unique approach – legal, visual, and narrative – allowing for a broad comprehension of the various sources and methods of interpretation used by historians to research prostitution in eighteenth-century London. After a brief introduction to each of the author's works, I will move on to a more detailed analysis of the research methods and interpretive techniques they use.

Tony Henderson's *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* provides an in-depth view of the attempts by authorities and other concerned bodies, such as social commentators and Reformation of Manners societies, to control, eradicate, and reform prostitution and its participants. In addition to this, Henderson is concerned with providing an understanding of the structure and practice of prostitution in this period, reconstructing the life experiences of prostitutes and revealing its place within the greater social framework of London. In this way,

Henderson is doing exactly what Gilfoyle praised in “Archaeologists in the Brothel” by addressing more personal questions about prostitutes and attempting to integrate them into the larger historical narrative.² In addition, though he does examine the relationship between reformers and the prostitute, he does so via a “prostitute-centred history.”³ Thus, he gives a more sympathetic portrayal in which reformers were “simultaneously an irritation and an opportunity for the prostitutes rather than – as has often been the case – the other way around.”⁴ Henderson achieves his goals dividing the book into chapters which discuss in turn: the experience of prostitution, including the age and background of those who become prostitutes, its geographic location within London, its legal history, attempts by authorities to police streetwalkers and the more permanent disorderly houses, and societal attitudes toward prostitution.

As Henderson’s two primary goals with this work are to uncover the experience of eighteenth-century prostitutes and examine the relationship between them and London authorities, his extensive utilization of legal records is of primary importance to his research. The use of such sources for the purpose of understanding relationships between authority figures and offender seems straightforward enough, but his attempt to utilize them for the purpose of reconstructing the experience of the eighteenth-century prostitute shows a particularly innovative approach. The legal sources he employs include: documents of the ward and parish watches of the City and Westminster, such as charge books, beadles’ and patrols’ report books, and watch committee minute books; extensive court-related records such as the notes of cases heard by the

²Henderson, 2; Gilfoyle, 139.

³Henderson, 11.

⁴Ibid., 12.

Court of Aldermen, the accounts of individuals held for trial in the Southwark compter and descriptions of trials held at the Old Bailey; and the minutes and reports of various Select Committees set up for the purpose of assessing the policing of and the social issues present in the metropolis.⁵

Charge books were logbooks kept in each ward or parish watch house in which the constable of the night would record details regarding every individual brought there and charged by the night watchmen. Details included the name of the offender and that of the individual charging them, the date, time and location of the offence, and a description of the charge and the circumstances surrounding it. Later entries also included a short explanation of the fate of the accused, such as the date of their subsequent appearance before a JP and the resulting verdict.⁶ Beadles' and patrols' report books are essentially indistinguishable, as both were required to patrol the streets for the purpose of checking on the watchmen's conduct and recording any noteworthy events. Typically the content was limited to a mention of the watchmen's attentiveness or a simple "all well," though many entries contained information regarding the presence and activity of prostitutes.⁷ Watch committee minute books contained information regarding the organization of the watch, such as regulations, methods and plans for restructuring, the deployment of additional patrols in response to perceived problems, and any complaints presented against the

⁵Ibid., 5-6. "The City" refers to "the City of London" - the proper term for the section of London contained within the walls and making up its traditional boundaries; later, areas outside of London proper were incorporated, creating boroughs which were referred to as separate municipalities and were under separate legal jurisdiction. For purposes of policing, the City was divided into twenty-six wards, which functioned as self-governing bodies headed by elected aldermen, while the boroughs remained divided by their parishes, which had existed since before they were incorporated into London. The City was also divided into 108 parishes, though these were much smaller than the wards and functioned as units of church governance. Henderson, 6.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., 7.

watchmen or beadles. The cases heard by the City aldermen included annual presentments of documents from each parish detailing suspected bawdy-houses with the intent of having them prosecuted by the City as well as cases brought before them by the prisons - oftentimes regarding prostitutes - which were recorded in minute books. The various trial records of prostitutes, including those of the Southwark Compter and the Old Bailey, contained information on the subjects such as name, age, physical appearance, place of residence, character observations, and the date and verdict of trial. In the case of the *Old Bailey Sessions Papers* (OBSP), they were sold in the streets for purposes of entertainment eight times a year, after each Justice Hall session. The Select Committees on the Police of the Metropolis occupied themselves with different urban issues each time a new one was set up, such as public houses and licensing laws, the existence of child offenders, vagrancy, and, for Henderson's explicit purposes, declining morals and prostitution. These Committees reported on the state of policing in the capital, supplying their findings in the form of reports and printed minutes.

Henderson's use of the various types of legal records is remarkably in-depth and original. Though he employs other types of sources, his use of legal records is central to his findings and his analysis, as he seeks to examine them in a new and innovative way. Of secondary importance is Henderson's use of popular print sources including various newspapers and magazines and a number of eighteenth-century pamphlets regarding prostitution, as well as private sources such as travel journals, especially that of James Boswell, which is put to extensive use. His dedication to the analysis of a vast array of such complex and multifaceted sources renders his study invaluable, as he succeeds in not only

pulling meaning and structure from them in the form of numbers and statistics, primarily in the case of his legal sources, but also in reconstructing an understanding of the personal lives and experiences of eighteenth-century prostitutes. His supplementary written sources are especially useful in sections of his book concerning the history of law regarding prostitution and the evolution of social attitudes toward it, but his use of legal documents inform the central properties of his analysis and provide it with the insight that makes the work so valuable.

In *Purchasing Power: Representing Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century English Popular Print Culture*, Sophie Carter surveys representations of prostitutes and prostitution in popular print culture, giving special focus to its visual elements. Utilizing a thematic analysis of topics such as the representation of the prostitute/client relationship, the role and representation of the bawd, and the prostitute's body and masquerade, Carter analyzes the illustrations that accompanied eighteenth-century popular pamphlet literature as well as those which would have functioned as pieces of art in and of themselves. In her examinations of the visual sources, Carter looks for symbols and meaning which convey information about eighteenth-century societal attitudes toward prostitution and its accessories, and - often setting the images in their larger framework by supplementing them with written material - seeks to show that social anxieties regarding prostitution were much greater than the generally libertine air of this period might suggest.

As Carter's key source material comes from the visual elements of popular print culture of the eighteenth century, her approach to the study of prostitution is unique. Of especial importance to her examination is the series of paintings and

engravings by William Hogarth entitled *A Harlot's Progress*.⁸ The paintings, which were subsequently lost, were revealed in 1731, while the engravings were published the following year. The six images portray the journey of the protagonist Moll Hackabout from her arrival in London to her death from venereal disease at the age of twenty-three, after she had been tricked into prostitution by an old bawd. Carter devotes her entire second chapter to a reading of *A Harlot's Progress*, in order to discuss the culturally constructed "narrative of prostitution" popular at this time and which these images emphatically depict. She proceeds to deliberate on Hogarth's inspiration by discussing the fact that this narrative was part of a broader cultural fascination with prostitution and the criminal underworld which had already matured into an "established ... venerable framework for describing the life of the archetypal London prostitute."⁹ To illustrate this, she uses pamphlet sources such as the *Grub Street Journal*, published between 1730 and 1738, John Dunton's *The Nightwalker* (1697) and Defoe's essay *Some Consideration upon Street-walkers* (1726), all of which contain elements of the "narrative."¹⁰ After Hogarth's publication of the prints, Carter claims that their subsequent popularity was due not only to the fact that Hogarth had succeeded in immortalizing in art trendy contemporary events, as many art historians have claimed, but that he also succeeded in packaging a prevalent cultural narrative, thus giving it greater tangibility as such.¹¹ It became a reference point recognizable by most members of London society, found in theatres, literature, and especially in the flurry of published prints which openly

⁸Both the paintings and the engravings are each a complete set of the six images.

⁹Carter, 33.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 34.

plagiarized it.¹² The importance that Carter takes from this is that the narrative put forward by Hogarth cannot be said to have been subsequently “plagiarized,” because Hogarth himself had also been influenced by the work of others before him (though primarily in print form); thus Hogarth had merely been recycling a narrative which was “already cultural property.”¹³ The revolutionary nature of Hogarth’s work – and the fact that it inspired so many copy-cats – lay in the fact that the cultural narrative was put in visual form as well as that it was packaged in a very appealing and straight-forward way.

Having described the cultural “narrative” of prostitution that was standard by the eighteenth century and omnipresent within popular culture – thus lending credence to her claim that prostitution was a great social preoccupation – Carter uses subsequent chapters to discuss in detail the visual representations of various elements of prostitution. These chapters include the prostitute/client relationship, the figure of the bawd, and the prostitute as a masquerading body. In doing so, Carter attempts to determine what these representations reveal about greater cultural attitudes toward prostitution. To form her analyses, she uses images such as *An Evening’s Invitation with a Wink from the Bagnio* (1773), *A Rich Privateer Brought Safe into Port by Two First Rates* (1782), *The Tar’s Dilemma* (1773), *St. James, St. Giles* (1794), *The Whore’s Last Shift* (1779), *Dressing for the Masquerade* (1790), *Deceitful Kisses, or the Pretty Plunderers* (1781), and *A Harlot’s Progress* (1731-1732) and its various sets of copy-cats. Carter complements her visual analyses with various eighteenth-century print sources, including instances of popular pamphlet literature and Boswell’s journal.

Carter’s examination proves a unique approach to the study of the topic,

¹²Ibid., 34-37.

¹³Ibid., 36-37.

due to the fact that she relies almost exclusively on visual sources, where others typically focus on written ones, as well as to the fact that her analysis of individual images is in depth and relies on specialized techniques such as iconology and symbology. She supplements her analyses of visual material with extensive written material, but never lets the latter overshadow the former. She effectively supports her thesis that prostitution was a prominent social anxiety in this time, indicating that the characteristic air of libertinism believed to exist during the period may be less conventional than traditionally assumed, by portraying the variously negative attitudes toward prostitution's existence within society. As well, she succeeds in conveying its prominence within this society and the various and evolving social attitudes towards it and its practitioners.

The third and final work to be analyzed is Laura Rosenthal's *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*. Once again, Rosenthal takes an approach comparatively unique to scholarship on the subject, her analysis hinging on the study of culturally significant eighteenth-century works such as *The Rover* (1677), by Aphra Behn, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson and its various responses, *Roxana* (1724) by Daniel Defoe, and *Clarissa* (1748), also by Samuel Richardson. Supplementing these with various pieces of popular print culture such as prostitute biographies, satire, and reformist writings, Rosenthal traces the evolution of attitudes towards prostitutes from that of the wanton, libidinous whore to the victim of circumstance.

Rosenthal ties this evolution in attitudes to capitalism and the emerging marketplace. She argues that the increasing obsession with prostitution throughout this period – made evident, for her purposes, by the frequency with

which it appeared in the literature – was due largely to the fact that it provided a useful trope for understanding the alienation of the worker in the emerging marketplace. Conversely, it also brought under consideration the opportunities afforded by the consumer revolution. The existence of both of these themes within the literature, then, helped audiences make sense of the extreme societal changes taking place. In this way, Rosenthal's work addresses manifold issues in a parallel fashion, acquainting the reader with shifting perceptions of the prostitute as ascertained from the literature while simultaneously explaining this shift through an analysis of the economic and social issues of modernity, capitalism and commercialism.

Rosenthal's exhaustive analysis of key fictional works provides depth to the argument while her use of supplementary works expands its scope. Her ability to draw inferences from her materials regarding the context of the emerging commercialism of eighteenth-century London provides the study of prostitution with a fresh perspective and an intriguing backdrop. Though many historians would argue that fiction is a questionable source for reconstructing history, Rosenthal is concerned primarily with broad cultural attitudes towards prostitution and the ways that it was applied to parallel commercialism and capitalism. Thus, her fictional sources are used to provide insight into the cultural mentality rather than reconstruct information about prostitution's actual practice.

The works of Tony Henderson, Sophie Carter, and Laura J. Rosenthal provide the study of prostitution with three very different, yet complementary, perspectives. As with any study of eighteenth-century prostitution, the canonical body of popular pamphlet literature is employed in all three cases, but the

emphasis of each author is unique due to their use of less conventional sources. Now that an understanding of the focus, content and source material of each work has been established, an examination of the methods and techniques employed in the interpretation of those sources can provide a deeper comprehension of attempts by historians to study eighteenth-century prostitution.

Chapter 4:

Themes in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Prostitution

In the study of eighteenth-century prostitution certain themes reappear frequently in books on the topic, including those of Tony Henderson, Sophie Carter and Laura Rosenthal. The most important of these are, firstly, the experience of prostitution by the prostitutes themselves; secondly, contemporary attitudes toward prostitution and shifts which may have taken place in these attitudes, and, thirdly, the broader social picture that emerges from a study of prostitution. Each of these three themes will be examined through the lens of the author whose work most effectively focuses on them and most constructively utilizes them to contribute to the body of historical knowledge on eighteenth-century prostitution.

Tony Henderson's primary goal is to understand the experience of the prostitute in eighteenth-century London. Though he addresses issues such as the geographical location of the trade within London and the interaction of prostitution with the law, which also pertain to this understanding, his attention to the personal backgrounds and social circumstances of women who ultimately engaged in prostitution is central to his analysis. While he covers many issues in this regard, I will focus my attention on his study of the background and social circumstance of the eighteenth-century prostitute, particularly with respect to social origin, geographical origin, and age.

In his discussion of social origin, Henderson gathers his information from two legal sources – the Police Committee Report of Thomas Pellatt and the Place Papers of John Fielding – and supplements them with the opinions of various writers and social commentators. He discovers that the majority of those who were proven to have engaged in prostitution, primarily through their having

applied for aid from an institution or been arrested, were either orphaned or had only one remaining parent. In one example taken from Fielding's records, twenty-two of the twenty-five women questioned had been orphaned or deserted.¹ Thus, Henderson concludes that a large majority of women who ended up in prostitution in the eighteenth century were from working-class backgrounds and were often parent-less. This reinforces a common conception that women who ended up in prostitution were somehow forced to do so by their socio-economic circumstances.

Furthermore, Henderson shows that many of those who engaged in prostitution did so in order to supplement their meagre wages in other professional areas. He concludes that the clothing and service industries were the most at-risk fields. The clothing industry was perceived by contemporaries to be extremely vulnerable, and was even referred to as “[a] seminar[y] of prostitution” by commentator C. Horne. This vulnerability was believed to be due to “a combination of bad working conditions, low pay and the essentially trivial nature of the industries’ products.”² This situation was exacerbated later in the century by the increasing domination of the trade by men, which led to fewer profitable opportunities for women.³ Of fourteen women arrested for prostitution in Southwark who revealed their former occupations, nine were connected to the clothing industry.⁴

Henderson also establishes that service was likewise viewed to be a

¹Henderson, 14.

²C. Horne, *Serious Thoughts on the Miseries of Seduction and Prostitution, with a full Account of the Evils that produce them; plainly showing Prostitution to be contrary to the Laws of Nature, And a Method Pointed Out, Whereby These Two Dreadful Evils May be Totally Exterminated, Fairly Deduced from the Laws of God and Nature* (1783). Cited in Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London*, 14.

³Henderson, 15.

⁴*Ibid.*

vulnerable profession for entrance into prostitution, even motivating the creation of a hospital which served as a preventative measure for those who had been discharged from service without prospects.⁵ The statements of concerned individuals, including Defoe and Pellatt, who claimed that the majority of women requesting entrance to the London Female Penitentiary had been domestic servants, leads Henderson to conclude that, indeed, a great number of maidservants were at risk of becoming prostitutes despite the fact that only one of the fourteen women mentioned above was a former servant. Furthermore, the presence of concern within other sources provides considerable evidence for the social conception that both the clothing as well as the service industries were sites of vulnerability for a transition into prostitution.

The second element in Henderson's analysis of the personal background of the eighteenth-century prostitute is their geographical origins. Citing two secondary sources, he states that an estimated two-thirds to three-quarters of London females were immigrants, leading him to reason that it may have been the same in the case of London prostitutes.⁶ To take this to the next level, it is conceivable that many of those women who immigrated may have, firstly, done so for the appeal of the city and the opportunities it was thought to afford despite the fact that they may not have possessed any real, concrete skills with which to make a comfortable living, and, secondly, may not have had any ties to anyone living in the city upon arrival. Thus, I would argue, it could be reasoned that immigrants may have been marginally more susceptible to ending up in the

⁵Ibid. "Prospects," in this case, meaning references or money – especially references, a lack of which was a sensitive issue for commentators.

⁶P.J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns, 1700-1800* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1982) and M.D. George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1925). Henderson, 18.

trade, simply due to their naivety and lack of experience as to surviving in the unfamiliar setting of the city.

However, Henderson supplies evidence which suggests that this may not have been the case, as the majority of Fielding's women had been born in London and a survey of a Bridewell selection shows that the numbers of London-born prostitutes and immigrant prostitutes were even.⁷ Social commentators studied by Henderson, however, such as Cesar de Saussure and William Hutton, stated their beliefs that most streetwalkers had come from the country to "seek their fortunes."⁸ To probe the issue further, Henderson analyzes a Southwark Compter record from 1814-1829 and displays the information in the form of a graph, as he does frequently throughout this work.⁹ The table groups seventy-eight individuals arrested for prostitution in Southwark of which the birthplace was supplied and recorded, and breaks down their location of birth to eight areas of England as well as Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Abroad. The greatest number (ten) are from Ireland, which makes up 12.82% of the total, while the West Counties have nine and the East counties zero, Scotland and Wales possessing three and two respectively, and two of the women stated as having come from "Abroad." These numbers total forty-seven migrants, or 60.25% of the full seventy-eight individuals. This means that thirty-one, or only 39.74% of the women were born and raised in London. As such, this particular grouping yields information which, contrary to some of the written sources such as Fielding, reinforces the assumption that a greater number of prostitutes were migrants from the country, or even, in two cases, from abroad, rather than citizens of

⁷Henderson, 18.

⁸C. de Saussure, *A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I and George II*, trans. and ed. Mme. van Muyden (1902), 203. Cited in Henderson, 18.

⁹Henderson, 21-27. Figures 2.1-2.8.

London.¹⁰ This provides a concrete example of the value of legal sources and the effectiveness of Henderson's approach to their utilization, while highlighting that written sources, especially when used alone, may not provide the highest level of accuracy.

The final element in Henderson's attempt to gather personal information on the women is his analysis of their ages, including age ranges at the time of record and the age of entry into prostitution as gathered upon questioning. Employing the use of various legal records and supplementing them with social opinions gathered from Reformation of Manners Societies' proposals for hospitals and the like for the benefit of prostitutes, Henderson attempts to reconstruct this data. Once again, he employs quantitative analysis to good effect, including eight separate graphs, six of which are line graphs and two of which are bar graphs.¹¹ The graphs are primarily separated by source, the first being made up of those arrested in Southwark as determined by the Southwark Compter, two having been structured from an analysis of reports regarding women held in Bridewell, the final three line graphs composed of numbers from the Old Bailey Sessions Papers, and the two bar graphs being those "questioned by John Fielding" as gathered by analysis of the Place Papers.

Through the seven graphs which address age, Henderson finds that the mean age was most commonly around the mid-twenties, but gives various reasons for why this may have been so high. In the case of one particular figure the distinguishing factor of the offenders is their conviction as "disorderly," which Henderson explains as a more general term likely comprising women other than bona fide prostitutes. Thus, the group of women who engaged in disorderly

¹⁰Henderson, 19. Table 2.1.

¹¹Henderson, 21-27. Figures 2.1-2.8.

conduct encompasses a much broader age range than those who may have been involved in prostitution in a more literal sense. In another graph he shows that the women were not actually tried as prostitutes, but rather for prostitution-related offences, meaning that they were largely convicted for theft and assault on their clients rather than the act of prostitution itself. Thus, such women often viewed themselves as thieves who employed prostitution as a means to an end rather than as actual prostitutes, encompassing a broader range of women and accounting for the higher average age. In addition, Henderson states that it was relatively common for juries to acquit younger women, which could have affected the results as well.¹² The selection of women questioned by John Fielding gives a much lower average, with the majority being between the ages of eighteen and nineteen (eleven of the twenty-five) and the entirety falling between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five.¹³ Thus, Henderson does not question the accuracy of any of the selections or testify to the truth of one over the other, but instead recognizes that each one possesses its own biases and limitations. In this way he postulates as to the age of eighteenth-century prostitutes, doing his best to overcome the inherent limitations of the topic but always keeping in mind that one's findings will never be universal.

Henderson supplements his examination of the records with publications which appealed for the creation of institutions for prostitutes, discovering that the average age of those applying for entry was between seventeen and eighteen years, and that the age considered to be most "at-risk" was between twelve and fifteen.¹⁴ Henderson also addresses the issue of child prostitution, which he

¹²Henderson, 25.

¹³Henderson, 22. Figure 2.2.

¹⁴Henderson, 22.

gauges through the writings of various social commentators as well as *The Times*, and which he essentially dismisses due to his findings within the legal sources. Though he admits it unquestionably occurred, he doubts the accuracy of the severity which popular sources, indicative of cultural opinion, suggested.

Having extracted all of the above information from the legal sources, Henderson claims that “it is just possible...to sketch a rough social characterisation...though it is clear that the nature of the trade, and of the sources, is such that many prostitutes would not conform to any such generalisation.”¹⁵ Despite these inherent limitations, Henderson is able to conclude through his analysis of commentators’ writings that most prostitutes entered the trade in their late teens or early twenties and only remained within it for a few years. According to the sources, it was typically four, after which the women either quit the trade, or life itself.¹⁶ Henderson essentially corroborates this evidence with his analysis of a selection of St. James charge books, as he also found that most had left the trade by their early- to mid-twenties, though he claims that the former may be a slight underestimation. In order to determine that these women had indeed left the trade, Henderson attempts to reconstruct their lives by tracing their presence in the legal sources to the point when they disappear from the record, and draws the conclusion from “meagre evidence” that a majority likely turned to positions of low-status, poorly-paid employment in conjunction with marriage.¹⁷

Henderson’s scholarship is evidently the product of a certain measure of hypothesizing, though he is very careful to employ his source materials

¹⁵Ibid., 25.

¹⁶J. Edgar DD, *Female Virtue – Its Enemies and Friends: a Discourse on the Statistics, Evils and Cure of Prostitution* (1841). Cited in Henderson, 18.

¹⁷Henderson, 50.

assiduously. His attempt to rely on legal sources almost exclusively, especially in relation to other studies, and the effectiveness with which he does so, shows the innovativeness of his approach. In addition, the decision to supplement his findings within the legal sources with the more general content of the popular sources lends increased credibility to his work, as this allows him to bolster rather than diminish its integrity through narrowness. Thus, he achieves an ideal balance between the implementation of one unique source type and the inclusion of a broad enough source base to ensure feasibility. In this way, Henderson provides a work which, while it may remain moderately dry at times, is brimming with factual evidence and valuable insight into the lesser-explored realm of the experience of prostitution in eighteenth-century London.

In contrast, it is the attention to social attitudes toward prostitution which is of primary importance to Sophie Carter's work, and she tackles the topic through an examination of the visual imagery accompanying eighteenth-century pamphlet literature, as well as artwork which functioned on its own. Carter self-identifies as not being concerned with "the experience" of prostitution throughout her work as Henderson is, though she devotes the first chapter to its "practice", referring to prostitution's extent, location within London, and reputation.¹⁸ In this way Carter addresses some issues synonymous with those of Henderson, but chooses instead to examine the cultural construction of the prostitute as an introduction to her book-length discussion of its place in society and attitudes toward it. In fact, in her first chapter, Carter cites Henderson at length, referring to his research rather than tackling the issue on her own. Moreover, she states that print images are not documentary evidence, but rather are useful as representations of

¹⁸Carter, 3.

cultural anxieties.¹⁹ Thus, her sources determine the extent and nature of her analysis, and she does not attempt with any real dedication to examine the personal experience of the prostitute.

What Carter does tackle with great ingenuity and skill is an examination of societal perceptions of prostitution and their construction. She does this through the consideration of four primary themes, all of which are depicted in various visual forms: the archetypal eighteenth-century prostitute, the client/prostitute relationship, the bawd/prostitute relationship, and the masquerading body of the prostitute. Her examination of all of these themes provides the reader with an understanding of eighteenth-century social attitudes toward prostitution as well as supports her thesis that, despite the air of sexual freedom and libertinism that seemed to be characteristic of the time, the underlying attitude was one of extreme anxiety.

Carter begins her treatment of the theme of the archetypal eighteenth-century prostitute by examining Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*. As noted earlier, this series of six plates portrays the popular perception of the life of a prostitute at that time, and Carter supplements this with a comparative analysis of "copy-cat" works and different contemporary readings of their meaning in order to establish an understanding of contemporary attitudes toward prostitution. The first issue Carter addresses is the moral culpability of the woman in the paintings and their antecedents. Through her analysis of the various versions of the work as well as contemporary writings regarding the question, Carter concludes that an element of primary importance to these paintings was the portrayal of prostitution as "the fulfilment of an inherent tendency toward vice," shown as well by the fact that the

¹⁹Ibid., 155.

woman consistently appears to have acclimated to her new profession with significant enthusiasm.²⁰ In addition, male involvement is kept exclusively to peripheral roles rather than active participants in the trade itself, often insinuating that the male is a victim at the hands of women.²¹ The woman is portrayed as being so materialistic and willing to exploit men that the possibility of being seen as a victim is completely overpowered. Thus, Carter notes that the series of images, and consequently the narrative, are sure to maintain a moral integrity which exhibits that the immoral woman will be punished. This is a lesson which viewers, especially women, would have been expected by society to internalize, and which reflects societal anxieties regarding the feminine transgression and fall of the woman.

Carter also uses depictions of the prostitute/client relationship to understand social attitudes toward prostitution, primarily gathering meaning through the typical portrayal of the male client as victim and the female prostitute as a merciless temptress.²² Carter states that the two members of the prostitute/client relationship were of fundamental importance to one another, and were thus often portrayed together in visual print culture. She addresses the representation of this relationship in two ways which strengthen her thesis on the cultural anxiety regarding prostitutes: exploitation and spectacle. In her examination of the prostitute/client relationship as exploitative, Carter examines a number of important prints in which she analyzes elements such as the body language and movement of the figures. In many recurring cases, Carter notes that the female figure of the prostitute is portrayed as exerting a measure of force

²⁰Ibid., 40.

²¹Ibid., 41.

²²Ibid., 60.

over the male client, which suggests coercion and control. Often this gives an initial impression of affection or attentiveness, but Carter dissects the images so as to successfully argue that the female presence is overwhelmingly oppressive and dominating throughout the prints, while the male is overshadowed and overpowered, suggesting that the female actually maintains control of the situation. Thus, as represented in these images, prostitutes were often portrayed as the aggressors rather than the victims, further endorsing the widespread cultural supposition that women, and especially prostitutes, could be dangerous to the well-being of men.

In addition, in many of these prints, Carter points out the frequency with which criminality on the part of the female subjects is portrayed, primarily through pick pocketing the male clients and often relying on a measure of physical assault to facilitate it. In some cases, the women work together to distract a client while an accomplice picks his pocket or removes his watch, and oftentimes the sheer number and force of the pair or group of women is portrayed as alarming. Carter notes that their physical representations are “robust” and “domineering” while the males are portrayed as foolish victims.²³ Contrary to what might traditionally be assumed about images portraying groups of men at the brothel – that such an activity is invaluable to homosocial bonding and that the men are the ones in control of the situation – Carter reveals that, instead, the images possess an insinuation that the men’s safety lies in numbers and that they are, in fact, at the mercy of the women.²⁴

In Carter’s attention to spectacle, she analyzes the popular print images to examine their use of the prostitute as a “man-trap.” Not only was the prostitute

²³Ibid., 59.

²⁴Ibid., 57.

able to physically coerce the male client, but there were also extensive anxieties regarding her ability to lure men with nothing more than a gaze. This was connected in part to prevalent cultural ideas regarding the duplicitous charms of the prostitute, or “syren,” as well as to scientific ideas which claimed that the power which lay in the eyes - the windows to the soul - and their gaze was a tangible, material phenomenon.²⁵ Thus, the portrayal of the prostitute as a dangerous member of London society extended to her involvement with male clients, and, through her examination of the visual sources, Carter provides further evidence for the cultural anxieties regarding prostitution by uncovering the existence of extreme fears of female control and male submission.

Carter’s examination of the role and representation of the bawd provides her analysis of eighteenth-century attitudes toward prostitution with an important development. As the eighteenth century progressed, the bawd became an archetypal figure in the prostitute narrative and the figure of the prostitute consequently became increasingly victimized in the face of the bawd’s characteristic cruelty and inhumanity. In her examination of the bawd, Carter studies several prints which portray the character with absolute consistency, lending weight to both the bawd’s importance as a symbolic figure within the narrative as well as to the cultural assumptions on which Carter draws. Carter identifies two elements necessary to the characterization of the bawd – her physical appearance and her physical presence.

In her analysis of the bawd’s physical appearance, Carter examines a number of prints to determine the features typical of the character. The bawd is consistently portrayed as having a grotesquely caricatured physique, including

²⁵Ibid., 68.

her weight, anatomical proportions and age. As well, she may appear intoxicated and generally undesirable. This excessiveness lends important meaning to her personality, as her outward appearance is meant to reflect her internal moral corruption. She has completely abandoned all morality, sinking to the depths of deceiving innocent women into her brothel, as well as 'innocent' potential clients, so that she can facilitate her voracious pleasures and vices without sacrificing herself, and her physical appearance has followed suit. The reflection of the bawd's moral corruption in her appearance is further supported by her actions.

Carter analyzes the physical presence of the bawd to highlight her importance as the architect of the prostitute's fall. In the prints, the bawd is often seen striking deals with male clients without the prostitute's knowledge; indeed, in many cases the woman and the bawd have not even met yet. This highlights the power the bawd holds over the unwitting women, as she succeeds in deciding their fate before they know it themselves. Thus, the bawd is an important figure in the prostitute narrative as she is the initial architect of the prostitute's fall, as well as the manager of the prostitute's subsequent career. Citing written sources from various eighteenth-century pamphlets, Carter contributes to this idea by showing the presence of attitudes regarding the monopolistic role of the bawd in the institution of prostitution as well as the overarching idea that "women are by women ruin'd most" and that prostitution is a self-perpetuating, autonomous force.²⁶ Thus, as the role of the bawd became increasingly omnipresent, the role of the prostitute became less and less negative. In many cases, the bawd's very physical appearance, and the moral state it implied, served as a direct contrast to the beauty, youth and innate

²⁶Ibid., 113.

innocence of the prostitute. In addition, the role of the male was made even more blameless, as the emphasis on the female function in perpetuating the trade was solidified.

The final element of visual print culture which Carter analyzes is the body of the prostitute as connected to the masquerade. Masquerades – essentially masked balls – were very important modes of entertainment in eighteenth-century London, frequented by individuals of all social levels.²⁷ They became massively popular after their introduction in the early years of the century, and were held as commercial ventures for which tickets could be purchased at coffee houses, theatres, and pleasure gardens. The inspiration came from both the Italianate Ridotto and earlier English carnivals, though their popularity as a novel form of entertainment must not be underestimated. They became a cultural phenomenon, saturating periodicals, fiction, poetry, and drama, and even inspiring a trend in portraiture which portrayed its subjects in costume. Masqueraders did not restrain their creativity, and, instead of limiting themselves to masks, wore the elaborate costumes of shepherdesses, harlequins, devils, animals, vegetables, and even members of the opposite sex. As these events embraced an upheaval in social boundaries, in the form of costume as well as behaviour, they incited great cultural anxiety on the part of more conservative citizens. They were believed to be nothing more than publicly sanctioned orgies, at which sexual boundaries and restraint were abandoned, and thus many commentaries against them also saturated the pages of popular print.²⁸

Due to their conceptual similarities of sexual abandon and social transgression, prostitution and the masquerade were commonly associated in

²⁷Ibid., 134.

²⁸Ibid., 131-132.

popular print. As the inherently covert nature of the masquerade provided ample opportunity for the mixing of prostitutes with respectable women, the event became cause for extreme social anxiety. In addition, the masquerade conversely became associated with the figure of the prostitute, as she was perceived to be in a perpetual state of masquerade. Cultural anxieties regarding women's attempts to alter their appearance with cosmetics, wigs, clothing and the like were especially relevant to the prostitute, and various print sources, which Carter discusses in detail, addressed this issue. The anxiety lay primarily in the idea that a man was never entirely sure what he was getting, especially in regards to venereal disease, an affliction with which cosmetics were "irretrievably associated."²⁹ Carter analyzes prints such as *The Fair Nun Unmask'd*, *The Young Wanton*, *The Whore's Last Shift* and *St. James's*, *St. Giles's* to illustrate this anxiety regarding the duality of the female and especially the prostitute.

In *The Fair Nun Unmask'd* the popular phenomenon of the prostitute masquerading as a nun is held up for commentary. Carter claims that the unmasking of the prostitute is merely portrayed to be a formality, as the insinuation is that such a woman's attempts to conceal her true identity as a whore are in vain. Thus, the male observer is reassured and his anxieties are, in part, relieved.³⁰ In contrast, images such as *The Young Wanton* and *St. James's*, *St. Giles's* are effective in their attempt to comment upon the difficulties of distinguishing between vice and virtue, prostitute and lady. In the former, the only sign of immodesty is the bed that can be seen through a door that has been left ajar, while the woman herself appears respectable in dress and behaviour.³¹ In

²⁹Ibid., 149.

³⁰Ibid., 140.

³¹Ibid., 142.

the latter, four prostitutes, two from an upper-class St. James brothel and two from the streets of the less desirable St. Giles, are contrasted by their appearances, which reflect their respective geographical situations. However, Carter argues that it is not the ugliness of the St. Giles women that is the focus, but rather, the air of virtue and propriety of the St. James women which is cause for alarm. Carter claims that this contrast in the two types of women implies that the beauty of the St. James women is literally only skin-deep and that underneath is concealed a St. Giles woman.³² Similarly, in *The Whore's Last Shift* this duality is combined into one image and one figure, as the unkempt state of the whore's shift, that which would be found concealed beneath the gilding, is in direct contrast to the wig and finery surrounding her.³³

Carter's utilization of eighteenth-century visual sources to understand societal attitudes toward prostitution in the period renders valuable insight into the topic. Her approach is unique and effective, as her analysis centers around an in-depth reading of various elements of the prints, including the symbols and icons, the interaction of the subjects, and even the implied movement present in the image. Thus, she employs techniques borrowed from fields such as art history to enrich her analysis.³⁴ In addition, she not only applies detailed analyses to each print, but also uses them in conjunction with one another to build or support an argument. As such, her approach is not only effective but also innovative, contributing to the body of knowledge regarding social attitudes toward prostitution in the eighteenth century already in existence and expanding it. She studies her visual sources with the intention of proving that cultural

³²Ibid., 146.

³³Ibid., 150.

³⁴Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: A Concise History* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 2-13.

anxieties regarding prostitution were prevalent, and its depiction within these sources was “carefully mediated” with the intention of “enforc[ing] dominant social values, preserv[ing] cultural norms, and apportion[ing] blame and responsibility.”³⁵ In this way, her sources are useful in establishing the portrayals of prostitution as vehicles for various social opinions, especially those advocating caution around the transgression of established boundaries. Thus she provides an understanding of the integral place of prostitution within eighteenth-century society rather than its position on the margins.

Laura J. Rosenthal’s work, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, is not written with the intention of uncovering the experience of the eighteenth-century prostitute, but to examine broader societal attitudes toward prostitution and specifically their connection to increasing social anxieties regarding commercialization and capitalism. In comparison to Carter’s interest in attitudes toward prostitution as depicted in visual sources, Rosenthal’s work is also concerned with understanding attitudes toward prostitution. She achieves this through the study of another previously untapped source for this topic – canonical eighteenth-century novels, considered as such due to their popularity during the period and their tendency to be representative of it long after. Rosenthal attempts to take her analysis one step further than Carter, focusing on the larger, societal explanations for the existence of prostitution and popular opinion toward it rather than simply establishing the nature of the opinions themselves as Carter does. In this way, the two works are comparable in their treatment of societal attitudes toward prostitution in the eighteenth century, though Carter’s is more focused, while Rosenthal propels her

³⁵Carter, 25.

analysis to another level by examining the connection between social attitudes toward prostitution and the greater social anxieties in regards to commercialism.

Rosenthal ties together these two themes of the social attitudes toward prostitution and their broader implications for society, and it is from this that the individuality of Rosenthal's approach to the study of prostitution in the eighteenth century and use of the written sources becomes apparent. Rosenthal's unique approach to the study of eighteenth-century prostitution will be examined through attention to three discussions central to the composition of her work: the changing societal perceptions of the prostitute from the whore to the self-alienated capitalist, the opposing views of society on whether this was positive or negative, and the inevitable questions posed by members of eighteenth-century society as to the price necessary to survive in this new world.

The first element of Rosenthal's analysis of eighteenth-century prostitution is her attention to changing societal perceptions of the prostitute. Previous to the eighteenth century, the prostitute was widely assumed to be an insatiable creature driven by lust and uninhibited ambition and materialism.³⁶ With the turn of the century, however, opinions began to evolve, and she was seen increasingly as a calculating and astute business-woman simply trying to survive in the harsh times of capitalism, consumerism and commercialism. It is to this evolution that Rosenthal dedicates the first portion of her book, using iconic works such as Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, Eliza Haywood's *The Anti-Pamela*, and Henry Fielding's *Shamela*.

In analyzing these works, Rosenthal demonstrates that the success of the prostitute characters depends exclusively on their ability to self-divide for the

³⁶Rosenthal, 2.

purpose of distancing themselves from their work, allowing for survival within the cruel marketplace in which their trade transpires. One side of them remains genuine, while the other becomes an alienated operative able to carry out work which would otherwise be self-damaging. Rosenthal notes that in the works *The Rover* and *The Anti-Pamela*, the prostitute characters are unable to self-divide in this way, as they are too completely governed by their desires, and thus conform more accurately to the increasingly passé trope of the emotional, desire-driven whore. In the case of *The Rover*, the downfall of the lead character and prostitute, Angellica Bianca, comes about because of her unprofessional attachment to her “stallion.”³⁷ Angellica is incapable of viewing the relationship as a professional one, and ends up spending all of her profits on him and failing to procure additional, paying, male clients.

To supplement this argument, Rosenthal provides a framework by examining *The Whore's Retorick* by Ferrante Pallavicino, analyzing the lessons by the bawd character, Mother Cresswell, to understand money and profit rather than sex and pleasure, of which the whore's induction lessons would typically consist. Thus, the prostitute becomes just another player in the game of capitalism and the commercial marketplace, able to fit in and succeed like any other businessman. Taking this a step further, and connecting it to her thesis regarding the association between prostitution and the wider culture, Rosenthal states that it was also the author's intention to satirize the more traditional businessmen of the emerging commercial marketplace by comparing them to whores.³⁸ If a whore is capable of alienating herself from the enjoyment of sex for

³⁷In this instance, a term denoting the rakish man whom the protagonist supports financially through her earnings as a prostitute. The term possesses connotations which imply a sexual relationship, making it, essentially, the male counterpart to a mistress.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 31.

the sake of profit, then surely a businessman in his blind pursuit of money is also in the process of selling a bit of himself.³⁹

Rosenthal draws a similar conclusion from *The Anti-Pamela*, in which the protagonist, Syrena, destroys her chances at a comfortable life upon marriage to a wealthy man when she continues engaging in prostitution due to the powerful influence of her passions. In fact, this is only one instance of many in which she allows her inability to control pleasure-seeking to ruin her elaborately laid-out plans, leading to her repeated ruin. Thus, in her inability to self-divide a calculating self from her passionate self, with the intention of sealing a comfortable fate through a profitable marriage rather than engaging in sex for pleasure, she ultimately fails to succeed in the commercial world.

The Anti-Pamela was written by Haywood in response to Richardson's influential work, *Pamela*, in which the title character demonstrates her virtue by resisting the advances of her wealthy employer, only giving in when he finally agrees to marry her despite earlier hesitation due to their class disparity. In spite of the fact that she is falling in love with him, Pamela succeeds in isolating her passions as a result of her extreme virtuousness, and is ultimately rewarded for doing so by securing a profitable marriage. Contemporary audiences found her character hypocritical, believing that she had in fact engaged in prostitution due to the material benefits she gained through her marriage as well as the fact that she had needed to *resist* her desires in order to ensure the greatest gain.⁴⁰ However, Rosenthal has a different theory. She believes that Pamela's success is ensured because it is rewarded to those who "raise male desires, but at the same time exert remarkable control over their own," just as she proposed in her

³⁹Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰Ibid., 37.

analysis of Mother Cresswell.⁴¹ However, it is with Pamela's alleged hypocrisy in mind that Fielding wrote *Shamela*, a subversive satire which reveals the "true" nature of Pamela by retelling the story through her altered perspective. Thus, through an analysis of the opposing behaviours of the prostitute protagonists in these novels, Rosenthal uncovers the opinion that in order to succeed in the modern world, as Pamela and Shamela do and Angellica and Syrena do not, one must successfully alienate oneself from one's work by separating passions from ambitions.

As the characterization of the prostitute became increasingly associated with calculation and business-mindedness, its hazardous consequences were of growing concern in the popular imagination. As the commercial marketplace continued developing, demanding more and more alienation as it did, depictions of the prostitute as having transgressed the traditional bounds of humanity reflected these anxieties. In order to illustrate the prostitute as such, popular depictions borrowed from and paralleled another stock character – that of the Jew. To highlight this evolution, Rosenthal examines *Roxana* by Daniel Defoe, in which prostitution is characterized by its economic negotiation rather than as an indulgence or a mode of survival.⁴² The Jew in the literature of the period was an emblem of the unrestrained, almost inhuman drive toward wealth and materiality, and, thus, by paralleling this with the prostitute, she becomes inhuman as well. For this reason, the depiction of Jews and prostitutes became frequently concurrent in eighteenth-century sources, including the novel *Roxana*. Rosenthal proposes that, contrary to the fact that *Roxana* is usually seen as a commentary on moral and gender transgression, the novel's purpose is to demonstrate the

⁴¹Ibid., 41.

⁴²Ibid., 73.

title character's conflict with her movement towards self-commodification and embodiment of the figure of the Jew.⁴³ Thus, the novel provides an alternate perspective on the prostitute's ability to alienate her work and her pleasure, suggesting that this "devotion to profit, sometimes at the expense of sexual pleasure, could increasingly become part of her danger in the eighteenth century."⁴⁴

In order to represent yet another mode of thought regarding the prostitute's self-alienation, Rosenthal examines eighteenth-century prostitute narratives, comparing libertine narratives and reform narratives. She states that through their exploration of material temptation and survival in the commercial world, prostitute narratives provide important insight not only into the figure of the prostitute, but also into the greater cultural preoccupation with increasing commercialism.⁴⁵ Libertine narratives were typically satirical and bawdy in nature, focusing primarily on the social mobility of prostitutes, and also, as a result, on the anxieties facilitated by the increasing ease with which it was done.⁴⁶ Despite these anxieties, however, this type of narrative also possessed a tone of admiration for its subjects' self-ownership and perceived empowerment.⁴⁷ In stark contrast were the reform narratives which focused much more heavily on the objectification of the prostitute and the tragedy of their self-estrangement as related to the callous marketplace in which they were forced to survive. These narratives were written as a result of a growing mood of charity and reform towards prostitutes in the eighteenth century, and served to recast the figure of

⁴³Ibid., 74.

⁴⁴Ibid., 79.

⁴⁵Ibid., 99.

⁴⁶Ibid., 109.

⁴⁷Ibid., 99.

the prostitute as a victim and a representation of the self-sacrifice required to survive in the changing world. Going a step further, it was a societal conception that such women were virtuous at the core, but trapped inside mechanized, automaton-like bodies, and were thus perfect candidates for reform. To begin, Rosenthal examines various biographies of Sally Salisbury, an actual historical figure, including a libertine narrative in which she identifies the author's contempt for the fact that Sally had succeeded in deceiving the nobility in regards to her social position. It is not surprising that this was included in the story, as the blurring of social classes due to increased commercialism was a grave concern in eighteenth-century society, and one which manifested itself often within the pages of libertine narratives.⁴⁸ Rosenthal further illustrates anxieties regarding social mobility by analyzing a scene in which Sally bests a noblewoman who is attempting to expose her secret by revealing that the woman's husband's mother was once a laundress.⁴⁹ In addition, Sally outdoes the woman by suggesting that her sexual prowess is more valuable than the woman's high birth, providing another example of the shifting priorities and attribution of value in an increasingly commercial environment. Rosenthal also examines the tone of respect regarding the protagonist's upward mobility in *The Memoirs of the Celebrated Miss Fanny Murray*, as well as the inability to survive in the marketplace after embracing reform in *The Memoirs of Mrs. Margaret Leeson*. Both of these examples contribute to Rosenthal's understanding of the libertine narrative's respectful, yet at the same time anxious, attitude toward the changing nature of prostitution in the increasingly commercial world.

Rosenthal examines various reform narratives, including Martin Madan's

⁴⁸Ibid., 101.

⁴⁹Ibid., 103.

The Magdalen in which the protagonist, Fanny Sidney, is essentially forced into prostitution in order to survive and support her daughter. However, in this case, her virtue renders her morally incapable of continuing to behave in such a way and she gains admission to the Magdalen Hospital, in which she works herself to death in repentance. Rosenthal believes that in all of this – Fanny’s commitment to support her daughter, her humbling through prostitution, her strength of virtue and her extreme dedication to hard work – lay Fanny’s salvation and her heroism as a reform figure. Rosenthal cites further examples, such as *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House* and *The Sisters*, in which the driving force of the characters’ engagement in prostitution is their responsibility to support others. In this way, Rosenthal identifies the portrayal of the prostitute as a self-sacrificing victim in eighteenth-century reformist writing, revealing the continuing evolution of the character of the prostitute over the course of the eighteenth century as well as connecting this evolution to the increasing anxiety regarding self-alienation in the marketplace typical of the period.

By comparing libertine and reformist narratives, Rosenthal comes to the conclusion that each type possesses its own opinion regarding the nature of the prostitute and the nature of the emerging modern world. Libertine narratives highlight the independence and resilience of the prostitute, portraying her ability to self-divide for the pursuit of upward mobility as empowering, albeit with some anxiety, while reformist narratives emphasize that the prostitute is a victim of a cruel, proto-industrial world who is willing to sacrifice herself for the benefit of others, never fully becoming a commodity as she retains a virtuous core.⁵⁰ Through such a comparison, Rosenthal uncovers a great contrast in the

⁵⁰Ibid., 120.

emotional responses and level of optimism towards the shocks of a rapidly changing world.

Rosenthal's final examination deals with the question of survival in the marketplace through the analysis of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*. Rosenthal states that Richardson produced his work in an attempt to make sense of the new and unfamiliar state of his world through an exploration of the cost of surviving within it. In the novel, the title character is lured into a brothel by a man named Lovelace who tricks her with the promise of marriage, though once she discovers his true nature she refuses to take part in any sort of relationship with him. He subsequently drugs and rapes her, thus stealing the virtue which she tried so hard to protect, encouraged into doing so by the urgings of the prostitutes in the brothel. In an interesting connection to the theme of the passive male discussed by Carter, Rosenthal refers to the comment made by Lovelace that he is "a machine at last, and no free agent."⁵¹ Instead of succumbing to marriage with Lovelace, as was his hope once she had lost her virtue, Clarissa opposes it all the more fiercely. Rosenthal suggests that Richardson's moral here is that the loss of virginity is not tantamount to the loss of virtue, but rather that virtue is much deeper and more complex – especially during the time in which this was written, when the meaning of female virtue had become "unclear, unstable, and even contradictory."⁵² In response to her rape, Clarissa refuses to accept anything which might be tantamount to payment, including money and food, ultimately leading to her death. Rosenthal postulates that the message intended by Richardson in his exploration of the marketability of the self comes from his assertion as to which parts can be commoditized and which should

⁵¹Ibid., 129.

⁵²Ibid., 131.

remain priceless – unfortunately, in the emergent capitalism of the eighteenth-century world, survival depends on one’s willingness to sacrifice parts of one’s core self and a refusal to do so can be fatal.⁵³

Rosenthal’s examination of prostitution in eighteenth-century London provides readers with a unique insight into the greater social implications of attitudes toward prostitution during the period. In this way, Rosenthal’s in-depth treatment of various writings takes our understanding of the subject to the next level, connecting what was often relegated to the margins to its broader context and, therefore, enriching our comprehension of it. Such far-reaching scholarship as this is especially beneficial to the extension of our knowledge to other areas of enquiry, as it promotes open-mindedness and a willingness to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. Though her study remains closely focused on her particular thesis regarding commercialization and self-alienation, and her evidence is usually employed to exclusively reflect this, she nonetheless provides a valuable contribution to scholarship on eighteenth-century prostitution and promotes the study of history as a consideration of the big picture rather than of just a small element of the past.

⁵³Ibid., 153.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

Through an understanding of the unique approaches that three different authors have taken in studying eighteenth-century prostitution, the pros and cons of the attempts to reconstruct a complex topic such as prostitution can be made evident, ideally resulting in a clearer vision as to what will yield the best results. In regards to the study of the experience of prostitution, it is evident that Henderson's use of legal records is a reputable method, as he succeeds in gaining valuable insight into the personal background of the eighteenth-century prostitute. It is useful to recall that Carter felt that her visual sources were not conducive to these purposes due to their inherent bias as reflections of social thought, and relied on Henderson's findings herself. However, it is arguable that Henderson's sources also possess a bias, which he addresses, though he himself, having studied them, states that this is "not necessarily a disadvantage to the historian."¹ Though they possess a "tangle of hidden, and not-so-hidden, agendas of those whose testimony is recorded," they contain considerable information such as the ages of prostitutes, and though they must be read with a measure of scepticism, Henderson believes that this should not progress to disbelief.² Quoting J.H. Langbein, Henderson states that such sources "touch on countless facets of the social and economic life of the metropolis and give us sustained contact with the lives and language of the ordinary people of the time."³ Thus, the uses of legal sources are evident, and the prejudices which do remain can also be alleviated by supplementing findings with alternative sources.

¹Henderson, 11.

²Ibid., 9-11.

³J.H. Langbein, "Shaping the Eighteenth-Century Criminal Trial: A View From the Ryder Sources," *University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1983), 271. Cited in Henderson, 9.

In many instances throughout his book, Henderson does this to good effect, primarily with pamphlet literature. In this way, he effectively cross-references his somewhat formulaic legal sources with the more fanciful popular ones, succeeding in extracting complementary material, an approach suggested by Paul Griffiths in his article “The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London” to be the most accurate and beneficial approach to the reconstruction of history. In addition, the quantitative method with which Henderson approaches his legal sources helps to alleviate any inherent biases by attributing the value of the sources to their statistical content rather than to their subjective undertones.

In the attempt to reconstruct an understanding of eighteenth-century prostitution, popular pamphlet literature remains of key value due to its widespread availability and its inherently qualitative nature. As such, it was used by every author, primarily in their attempts to reveal social attitudes toward prostitution. However, as the focus of each author was on a different type of source than traditional pamphlet literature, such literature being used as merely complementary, it is clear that popular sources such as visual imagery and novels are also conducive to an understanding of social attitudes. It is no accident that both Carter’s and Rosenthal’s works focused on popular perceptions of prostitution and used sources connected with popular culture, or that Henderson’s focus diverged from that of social attitudes, employing sources which were not targeted towards or available to the public. As Carter’s chief sources were the most intimately connected with pamphlet literature – oftentimes accompanying it – it is not surprising that her work is the most focused on social attitudes toward prostitution.⁴ Thus, despite historians’ attempts to broaden

⁴In the case of Carter’s sources, it could be argued that the images were simply visual renditions of what was being written in the pamphlet literature and thus lack value as distinctive

source implementation, pamphlet literature remains invaluable to the study of eighteenth-century prostitution, especially in regards to understanding social attitudes. However, these three authors have demonstrated that it is possible, or even preferable, to continue to expand the study of sources to include less traditional ones if pamphlet sources are used as supplementary rather than exclusive.

Though Rosenthal also examined popular attitudes, her gaze was focused on the broader cultural evolution of these views and how it connected to wider cultural concerns, rather than remaining concentrated on attitudes toward particular elements of prostitution. As such, her sources – eighteenth-century novels – held the potential for establishing both societal concerns, due to their nature as popular sources, as well as portraying broader cultural ones. This could be due in part to the fact that the characteristic length of a novel allows for a more complete incorporation of the writer's consciousness, and thus allows for a deeper analysis of the greater cultural anxieties present. As a result, Rosenthal was able to trace anxieties regarding the increasing commercialism and consumerism throughout the entirety of the various novels, extracting vital information on the greater cultural mentality present in the eighteenth century through the lens of prostitution. Though historians such as Griffiths argue that the exclusive use of literary sources is inadvisable, due to their didacticism and their comparatively anecdotal and sensational nature, he also claims, in "The Structure of Prostitution," that they are useful as supplements to legal sources

sources. However, I would argue that, due to the growing popularity of visual print culture in the period, and the greater accessibility of images compared to written mediums (which required a lengthier time for reading) her analysis possesses a uniqueness which is invaluable to scholarship on the topic. In addition, many of the images she examines were published without the accompaniment of writing.

such as courtbooks.⁵ Rosenthal does not employ both types of sources together, but since her goal is to focus exclusively on cultural attitudes towards prostitution, she should not be expected to supplement her findings with the more “genuine” ones found in legal sources.

Though it is conceivable that any of the above sources could be employed for the purposes of acquiring the information given by the others – as, with enough dedication and imagination any source could speak to some extent for the purposes desired – it is clear that certain sources are most valuable to particular ends. Legal sources are important to the study not only of legal proceedings of the time but also provide the basis for statistical analysis, and can even be employed effectively as indicators of their subjects’ personal experiences. Though images and narratives also portray information about the lives of prostitutes, they are products of social preconceptions and are not conducive to the same statistical analysis as legal ones. Thus, they are more useful in reconstructing an understanding of the social attitudes characteristic of the time. The in-depth nature of a novel also allows for a more comprehensive analysis, providing the researcher with insights into broader cultural concerns which cannot be as effectively portrayed in the comparative dryness of legal sources and the erratic nature of pamphlet publication (in which Carter’s visual sources were largely displayed), though the latter is certainly more viable if given a broad range and great volume of material. Thus, each of the three authors is successful in substantiating their respective theses and goals, as they each tailor their arguments to their chosen body of sources.

Henderson’s work remains the most useful as a “prostitute-centred

⁵Griffiths, 39, 52-53.

history” and an examination of the experience of prostitution. In addition, Henderson’s work is most demonstrative of Griffiths’ claim that the best scholarship comes from “a theoretically informed integrated reading of archival and creative literary sources, teasing out and explaining similarities and differences to satisfy contemporary sentiment and context, [and] always being aware of the moral subtext and storytelling which can affect all types of sources.” Though the value of any particular work remains subjective, the significance of Henderson’s work is indisputable, and his ability to reconstruct the experience of the prostitute, a current hot-topic in history, is unparalleled.⁶

That being said, the focus of both Carter and Rosenthal intentionally remains detached from the experience of the prostitute, and they instead contribute to innovative historical approaches through their attention to original source material and their attempt to place prostitution within the larger historical framework. Rosenthal’s approach is most effective in doing the latter, while Carter’s remains important for its thematic unpacking of the different facets of prostitution. Thus, each work is valuable in its own right. All three historians have made important contributions to the subject of eighteenth-century prostitution respective to their individual goals of analysis and source implementation, each successfully tackling an innovative type of source and providing an exhaustive examination.

With their works functioning as a collective unit, a comprehensive understanding of eighteenth-century prostitution emerges, as these historians confront the issues of the prostitute’s experience, wider societal views toward prostitution, and, in turn, what these views can tell us about greater societal

⁶Ibid., 54.

concerns. Thus, as every individual historian approaches his or her topic with a slightly different outlook, therefore producing unique results, history remains a collective enterprise. This is especially important in the study of prostitution as such a complex topic can benefit from having a range of experts who, individually, employ sources and methods which appeal to them, but, collectively, work together to provide a window to the past. Despite their ability to provide complementarity to the study of prostitution, the three works examined in this paper do possess a similarity which suggests that, regardless of their individuality, current historians of prostitution are indeed working towards a common goal – the all-important construction of the prostitute's position within the wider social framework. In this way, these three writers have located prostitution within eighteenth-century London and revealed that it was much more than an accepted feature of society, as our understandings of libertinism would suggest. Henderson conveys the extent of the efforts put towards policing it, Carter communicates the social anxieties regarding the figure of the prostitute, and Rosenthal describes the deep connection between perceptions of the prostitute and the cultural disquiet regarding the changing commercial landscape. Thus, all three authors have contributed invaluable pieces of work to the field of history, placing prostitution within the wider social framework in which it existed and broadening our understanding of the subject through attention to largely unexplored areas such as the life of the prostitute and the position of prostitution within eighteenth-century London culture.

What evidently remains vital to the study of eighteenth-century prostitution on an individual level is historians' employment of supplementary sources. In choosing a principal type of source for analysis, especially one which is less

traditional, many doors can be opened; however, the truth remains that studying any one type of source without questioning and cross-referencing can be detrimental to historical understanding. Thus, in studying any historical topic, but especially those such as prostitution which are laden with inherent difficulties, one will do best to possess an open mind and attempt to push the boundaries, especially in regards to source implementation, but not forget that an adherence to established methods is vital as well. Thus, learning from the successes of the past will ensure that historians continue to employ tried and true techniques, while attempting innovation will ensure that their craft continues to develop. In this way, the field of history will be continually augmented and previously neglected topics such as prostitution will be increasingly understood, providing historians and society as a whole with a richer knowledge of the past, as well as the present.

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