

## INTRODUCTION: VENAL BODIES – PROSTITUTES AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CULTURE

Markman Ellis and Ann Lewis

Prostitutes, and prostitution, were notoriously visible in eighteenth-century European culture, a visibility that was amply reflected in political and cultural discourses. Commonly understood as an index of the moral temperature of society, the perceived increase in prostitution in the major cities of Europe offered its own conclusions. Moral reformers, who considered prostitutes a ‘common nuisance’, were numerous. In London, the Rev. William Dodd, writing in the *Public Ledger* in 1760, discovered in prostitution a telling sign of public vice:

Impudence no longer courts the shade. Let any man walk up a certain street leading from the Strand, and he will see numbers of unhappy prostitutes in the broad daylight, plying their miserable trade! Cannot this be prevented? – If not, where is decency? If it can, where are our magistrates? They are not ignorant of these things.<sup>1</sup>

Pierre Jean Grosley, a French academician, in his *A Tour to London* (1772), reported that in 1765, prostitutes, or ‘Women of the Town’, as he called them,

were more numerous than at Paris, and have more liberty and effrontery than at Rome itself. About night-fall they range themselves in a file in the foot-paths of all the great streets, in companies of five or six, most of them dressed very genteelly. The low-taverns serve them as a retreat, to receive their gallants in: in those houses there is always a room set apart for this purpose. Whole rows of them accost passengers in the broad day-light; and above all, foreigners.<sup>2</sup>

Similar observations were made in France, where moral indignation was sometimes combined with a lucid awareness of the prostitute’s plight. Louis-Sébastien Mercier observed in his *Tableau de Paris* (1781–8) that:

the scandal of *filles publiques* is taken too far in the capital. Contempt for good morals ought not to be so visible, so flagrant. Modesty, and public decency should be respected more. How can an honest but poor paterfamilias hope to preserve his young daughter innocent and intact when she reaches the age of the passions, when

she sees an elegantly dressed prostitute attacking men, parading her vice before them, ostentatious in her debauchery, and even, protected by the laws, benefiting from her unbridled emancipation. ... And what inspires a truly profound horror, is the fact that if prostitution were suddenly to stop, twenty thousand *filles* would die of penury, the employment of this unfortunate sex being inadequate here to provide her with food, or maintain her.<sup>3</sup>

In both London and Paris, in provincial cities in both France and England, and even more broadly in Europe, the public visibility of prostitution, whether in the street or in the enclosed spaces of the theatre, tavern and brothel, ensured that prostitution was central to moral debate on sexual behaviour in the period.

Prostitution can be defined as sexual activity undertaken for money or some other remuneration. Its precise meaning is hard to pin down in this period, whether in moral, legal or practical terms, and problems of definition are interrogated throughout this volume: for example through the examination of explicit attempts at classification on the part of French writers (Lewis), the contested notion of the 'venal woman' in the court case of a French courtesan-diplomat (MacDonald) or the use of other terms such as 'vagrancy' and 'indecenty' to suggest prostitution within Norwegian court records (Bergkvist). Nonetheless, the visible prevalence of prostitution suggests that some general notion of sex work was widely understood across society. The scandal of prostitution in eighteenth-century culture was exactly its visibility in urban spaces: especially noticed in the prostitutes' distinct and particular modes of public interaction. The scene of prostitution – vulgar, sexual, deviant, boundary-crossing – undermined or contravened the established ideology of gender that championed a chaste and domestic femininity, both in England and France. As a result, prostitutes were the focus of intense debate in competing reformist discourses arguing for the regulation of public cultures of the street.

Tony Henderson's study of the lived experience of prostitution in mid-eighteenth-century London, derived from close analysis of the lowest levels of court and judicial records, show that women arrested for offences related to prostitution were most often born into poverty, undereducated, associated with textile and fashion trades, and had been born in London and the provinces. For most, prostitution was not the sole source of their income, but took its place alongside respectable employment, reception of charity and petty crime. These findings correspond closely to the situation in France, according to Erica-Marie Benabou's survey of different types of prostitution in eighteenth-century Paris, largely based on police records.<sup>4</sup> In London, most did not work in brothels, but solicited on the street: they were more numerous where customers were more numerous, such as around the docks, and in centers of entertainment, such as the West End and Covent Garden. As Henderson concludes:

Prostitutes were not therefore geographically separated from the mass of the city's population. Nor were they separated socially. They walked the same streets, drank at the same public houses and gin-shops, frequented the same parks, and in many cases lived in the same houses as Londoners of most, if not all, social classes.<sup>5</sup>

However prostitution is defined, it was always more than an act of mercenary sex. The event of prostitution in the eighteenth century was an extended performance, not simply confined to the act of fornication itself: as the written literary and polemic evidence suggests, it had its own spatial and temporal frame. In this sense, prostitution may be said to have a sexual dimension, and an economic one, but also a social one, and was constituted as the sum of all the parts of this performance. Analysis of prostitution needs to pay attention to all these parts. In the case of 'public' prostitution, the performance often began in the street, when the client encountered the prostitute ('the pick-up'). The prostitute was herself already acting up, performing being a prostitute in the street: loud, vulgar, impolite, breaching established habits of manners by accosting male clients as they walked past. Prostitution in the space of the street was occasioned with a clamor and gendered boundary-crossing not met elsewhere (except perhaps the theatre). It is here that the prostitution event performance begins. In this performance, the prostitute acts out 'being-a-prostitute': in doing this she (and although it was normally she, it was not always) contravenes and subverts all the approved modes of behavior of normative gender roles for women: passive politeness, public invisibility, sexual submissiveness, social domesticity, linguistic refinement. While the gendered discourse on manners inscribed certain forms of behavior as polite, domestic and feminine, the prostitute acted out of this expectation. It is this sense that sustains the heroic reading of the prostitute as a wild woman, a rebel against repressive social orthodoxy. In addition, in the prostitution event, the client acts out 'being-a-client', a situation with its own repertoire of received narratives: the duped country-man, the tempted drunk, the defrauded innocent, the wastrel libertine, the frustrated virgin. Received narratives of prostitution were in this way relentlessly recycled by popular culture, and repurposed in high culture, in novels, plays and visual culture. In their structuring of the cultural imaginary, such narrative stereotypes were fed back into real-life behaviour and perceptions of reality, as is shown in this volume by Kathryn Norberg's analysis of the use of libertine narrative conventions in the autobiography of a Parisian brothel madam of the mid-eighteenth century. The prostitution performance continues on various stages: diversely, a back room of a public house or coffee-house, a dark corner of an alleyway or street, under a bridge, in a carriage, or in the self-consciously staged environment of a brothel, bagnio or hummum, or in their own lodgings nearby. Each stage of the performance has at its centre an act of sexual activity ('the sex'), which is polymorphous in its variety, and diversely imagined as climactic, deflationary or violent. It continues until the sex act reaches its denouement

or conclusion, whatever that may be, but ends not with this sexual activity, but with the commercial transaction, 'the pay-off', in which money is exchanged for services rendered at the agreed rate of remuneration, or at least, the contracted event is somehow concluded and the transaction closed. And even after this point, the performance continues with the departure (variously dramatized as escape, criminal despoliation, anticlimax) and reflection (in the case of such a one as Boswell, occasioning a prolonged period of moral self-examination, recrimination and excoriation). In considering prostitution in the eighteenth century, the essays in this book examine many diverse aspects of its performance.<sup>6</sup>

A key aspect of the representation of the prostitution performance is the narrative position: answering the question, who is speaking? As Vivien Jones argues, one of the ethical difficulties of approaching the topic of eighteenth-century prostitution is precisely the fact that we rarely have access to the authentic voices of prostitutes.<sup>7</sup> More often, the life of the prostitute is constructed from records made by authorities in the exercise of their judicial and charitable powers: police records, watch charge books, charity accounts, court records. Discourse on prostitution is also commonly found in the voice of the moralist or reformer, who writes about prostitution as an object of political or religious concern. Detailed first-person accounts of prostitution written by sex-workers themselves in this period are not common, if indeed there were ever any. Norberg's study of Marie-Madeleine Dossemont, in this collection, offers an unusual and therefore highly significant account of the life and business practices of a brothelkeeper in mid-eighteenth-century Paris, derived from her own accounts of her brothel made in reports to police. Of the first-person voice of the client there are the private diaries of William Byrd and James Boswell, which provide revealingly detailed accounts of what men thought they were doing in the performance of prostitution.<sup>8</sup> But although the voice of the prostitute is largely missing from the historical record, there are numerous instances in which the voice of the prostitute or client is imitated and imagined. Numerous eighteenth-century writers found creative potential in the narrative of prostitution. Some of these literary accounts indeed offer themselves in the voice of the prostitute: the subgenre of the prostitute or whore biography is a good example. Such texts, modelled on the criminal biography, provide supposedly first-person accounts of the life story of a single-named prostitute or courtesan (following the term criminal biography, they have sometimes been called 'whore biographies').<sup>9</sup> In France, a similar but purely fictional genre of 'romans-mémoires des filles du monde' existed, recently defined and analysed in an important study by Mathilde Cortey.<sup>10</sup> In this volume, Lena Olsson examines the group of texts narrating the life of a celebrated prostitute Sarah Prydden, better known under her assumed name Sally Salisbury. Literary representations of women sex workers also proliferated in the eighteenth century in, for example, novels such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), and they

feature in a large proportion of canonical French novels, with varying degrees of centrality to the narrative. As Laura Rosenthal has recently argued, the discourse on prostitution also reflects on, and extends to include, such apparently moral or virtuous novels as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748–9).<sup>11</sup> This is also true of the French tradition, where we see several important episodes involving prostitutes in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) for example. And, as attested and explored in the recent work of Kathryn Norberg, Valérie van Crugten-André, and Patrick Wald Lasowski, among others, prostitutes were also central to libertine and erotic fiction.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-century, in England at least, the topic of prostitution had become a matter of public concern – that is to say, not merely as an issue of public order (in which calls for the suppression or regulation of prostitution had a long history), but also one of humanitarian concern. Proposals for the reform of prostitution, whether utopian or practical, located the debate on mercenary sexuality within wider topics in social philosophy, on female education, on the morality of commerce, on marriage, and on slavery. As the research of Coward and Benabou has shown, schemes of a commensurate nature were also imagined in France in this period.<sup>13</sup> As a visible sign of the sexualized female body, the prostitute was also a point of convergence for debates on the feminization of culture.

### Venal Bodies: What Is Prostitution in the Eighteenth Century?

Adam Smith does not have much to say about prostitution in *The Wealth of Nations*, and what he does say, is actually addressed to the topic of opera-singers and actresses. He notes that women who possess the 'very agreeable and beautiful talents' used in these employments must be paid a considerable amount in order to overcome the stigma attached to the work, the stigma of what he calls 'publick prostitution'.

The pecuniary recompence, therefore, of those who exercise them in this manner, must be sufficient, not only to pay for the time, labour, and expence of acquiring the talents, but for the discredit which attends the employment of them as the means of subsistence.<sup>14</sup>

Reading these lines in Smith, the feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum suggests that one of the unique aspects of prostitution is the social stigma attached to it, both now and in the early modern period.<sup>15</sup> This stigma is manifested in a number of overlapping social formations, many of which, especially disease, violence and poverty, are distinctly immiserating in the daily life of the sex worker. The force of stigma is also felt in and through language: through the extraordinary linguistic fluidity of the terms for prostitution. Prostitution is intensely metaphorized: none of the terms for this activity frequently in use in the eight-

eenth century – prostitute, harlot, strumpet, whore; *catin*, *putain*, *raccrocheuse* – are free from a distinct moral shading. Although the term ‘sex-worker’ was not used in the eighteenth century, it has been adopted in many of the essays in the present volume as a way to obviate the habitual stigma of the terms prevalent in the period. Although anachronistic, the term ‘sex work’, and ‘sex worker’, encompasses a wider variety of sexually related services and activities, including prostitution, but also (in this period) brothelkeeping, courtesans, mistress keeping, and concubinage – just as in the modern era sex-work research has expanded to cope with new varieties of sex labour (lap-dancing, phone sex, sex shop assistants).<sup>16</sup>

Discourse on prostitution is complex and braided by conflicting language and nuance because prostitution itself was understood in a variety of conflicting and overlapping ways as a social problem, a criminal activity, a moral state and a commercial activity. This complexity and fluidity can be traced in the language that was used to describe sex workers. Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language*, first published in 1755, gives some evidence of this peculiar fluidity. Johnson traces the etymology of the verb ‘to prostitute’ to the Latin *prostituo*, defining it as ‘to sell to wickedness; to expose to crimes for a reward. It is commonly used of women sold to whoredom by others or themselves; quoting *Leviticus* (xix, 29), ‘Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore’. As a noun Johnson defined the term ‘prostitute’ as firstly ‘a hireling; a mercenary; one who is set to sale’; and secondly as ‘a publick strumpet’, and prostitution, first, ‘the act of setting to sale; the state of being set to sale’ and second ‘The life of a publick strumpet’. In Johnson’s opinion, prostitution is firstly a commercial notion, and secondly a quality of moral stigma. This is revealed further in the other terms Johnson recognizes for this employment: whore, harlot and strumpet. The word ‘whore’ Johnson traces to a Saxon root: ‘Whore. 1. A woman who converses unlawfully with men; a fornicatress; an adultress; a strumpet. 2. A prostitute; a woman who receives men for money’. The term ‘whore’ thereafter figures in a range of definitions of vulgar slang: ‘Laced mutton. An old word for a whore’; ‘to lecher. To whore’; ‘Miss. ... A strumpet; a concubine; a whore; a prostitute’; ‘Mistress. ... A whore; a concubine’; ‘Punk. A whore; a common prostitute; a strumpet’; ‘Riggish. ... Wanton; whorish’; ‘Strumpet. A whore; a prostitute.’<sup>17</sup>

A similar pattern can be determined in the French context, where the language used to describe and define ‘prostitutes’ carries a heavy ideological freight. The definition for ‘prostituer, prostitution’ in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* uses morally charged vocabulary to evoke this activity, whose sexual and mercenary nature are outlined first, before a metaphorical sense is suggested (in terms of writers and philosophers prostituting their pens):

terme relatif à la débauche vénérienne. Une prostituée est celle qui s’abandonne à la lubricité de l’homme par quelque motif vil & mercenaire.<sup>18</sup>

In the highly colourful range of French terms for different types of prostitute identified and categorized by Rétif de la Bretonne and Louis-Sébastien Mercier in the last decades of the eighteenth century (see Table 1.1 in the present volume), not only the names but also the descriptive language used to define them are far from morally neutral, and frequently highly pejorative. Rétif describes 'les gouines', for example, as 'sales et dégoûtantes' (dirty and disgusting), while Mercier talks of those near the bottom of his scale of prostitutes as 'brutes' and 'hideuses créatures'. The pejorative associations of a number of the terms they use are also suggested in corresponding dictionary definitions of the period. The 'Dictionnaire de l'Académie française' (1798), for example, defines 'gouine' as a term of abuse, used by the 'popular classes': 'terme d'injure, qui se dit d'une coureuse, d'une femme de mauvaise vie ... il est populaire', and its definition of 'barboteuse' is similar: 'Raccrocheuse. Terme d'injure et de mépris, en parlant d'une femme de mauvaise vie, qui sollicite les hommes dans la rue ... Il est familier et même populaire'. In his *Dictionnaire libertin*, Wald Lasowski cites Furetière's definition of 'putain', which interestingly evokes both a sense of the social stigma associated with prostitution, and its implications in terms of social class: 'Terme barbare. La haine qu'on a contre ce nom l'a décrédité chez les honnêtes gens, et il n'est plus en usage que chez le peuple, quand il veut dire une injure atroce' (A barbarous term. The disgust that this term inspires has discredited it in honest company, and only common people use it, when they wish to give a dreadful insult).<sup>19</sup>

The stigma associated with prostitution need not be stated to be self-evident in eighteenth-century discourse. Mary Wollstonecraft, who one may suppose was inclined to support benevolent treatment of women in distress whenever and wherever she found them, reckoned the life of the prostitute the lowest in society. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) she considered the 'pernicious effects which arise from the unnatural distinctions established in society' by the force of gender. The poverty of the education open to women, she noted, meant they were given few options in commerce that would allow them a secure livelihood.

Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue, if they were educated in a more orderly manner, which might save many from common and legal *prostitution*. Women would not then marry for a support, as men accept of places under government, and neglect the implied duties; nor would an attempt to earn their own subsistence, a most laudable one! sink them almost to the level of those poor abandoned creatures who live by *prostitution*. For are not milliners and mantua-makers reckoned the next class?<sup>20</sup>

In her mingling of the language of strata with the opprobrium of moral stigma, Wollstonecraft accepts and confirms the stigmatized social exclusion of prostitutes.

As this suggests, the language of prostitution is especially ideological: lexical choice is embedded in complicated sets of social and moral attitudes. What follows is an attempt to map a broad sweep of the eighteenth-century discourse on prostitution (mercenary sex), using the British context as a case study. This map is in part horizontal, extending from the wilder shores of puritan moral discourse through the libertine to the sentimental. But it is also broadly, and complicatedly, historical, tracing an important shift in the language, discourse and culture of prostitution in the eighteenth century, noticing the emergence of a new understanding of the mercenary sex worker as a state of reduced agency, a form of slavery, to which amelioration, if not emancipation, might be appropriate. Adam Smith again: in his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Smith further considers the state of slave concubines in the West Indian colonies (women slaves taken as wives by plantation owners). These women, he argues, exist in a state of prostitution, as they are not free to leave their 'marriage', and yet may be discharged by their master at his will. Smith's understanding of prostitution as a form of wage slavery reinforces the stigma associated with the term, but also indicates that this stigmatized existence is itself a social scandal, as morally troubling to a civilized and commercial society as slavery itself.

The dominant understanding of the stigma of prostitution at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the British world, can be seen in the actions and discourse of Protestant social reform movements. These movements trace their origin to Puritan campaigns against urban vice: during the English Republic in the 1650s, for example, the Rump parliament had, in the Adultery Act of May 1650, passed legislation against prostitution, which specified that 'prostitutes and brothel-keepers were to be whipped, branded and imprisoned for a first offence, and to suffer the death penalty following any subsequent conviction'.<sup>21</sup> But the legislation was not widely enforced, and lapsed with the Restoration in 1660. The religious climate for moral reform returned after the accession to the throne of William III in 1689. In London especially, but also in many provincial towns, societies for the reformation of manners were established, lasting for almost five decades. The reformation of manners campaigners agitated against many forms of vice in the late seventeenth century, especially swearing and cursing, Sabbath breaking, drunkenness and gambling. The offence they prosecuted most frequently was 'lewd and disorderly practices': that is prostitutes and, to a much lesser extent, their clients. Robert Shoemaker argues that the 'vast majority' of those prosecuted for 'lewd and disorderly practices' were women; recent research has found some evidence that their male clients were also targeted.<sup>22</sup> As prostitution did not contravene any specific law in England, the societies for the reformation of manners had to use common law arguments to bring private prosecutions against fellow citizens they personally brought before the magistrates. In this sense, their own arguments, in the texts produced by the societies,

provide an important commentary of contemporary moral debate on prostitution. In their view, prostitution was sinful inasmuch as it was fornication outside marriage, and as such, it constituted a breach of the peace, as defined in common law. A guide first prepared for the society in 1698 ('An Abstract of the Penal-Laws against Immorality and Prophaneness') described all the 'Lewd' and 'Disorderly Practices' that could be prosecuted. Prostitution itself was not criminalized by any legislation, but prostitutes could be prosecuted, as 'Adultery, &c, and all Acts of Bawdry, are Breaches of the Peace.' The guidebook advised that 'If a Constable, &c., has Notice that a Woman is in Adultery, &c. with a Man, or that a Man and a Woman of evil Fame is gone to a suspected House,' then 'He may take Help with him, and if he find them so, he may carry them to Prison, or to a Justice, to be Bound over, and Prosecuted'. The guide also cited the legislation used to prosecute bawdy houses, resorters to and frequenters of bawdy houses, and common whoremasters. Those prostitutes and their clients found guilty of being 'Idlers that refuse to work,' disorderly persons or wandering rogues could be committed to the House of Correction, where they could face punishment by whipping or banishment to their place of birth.<sup>23</sup> In order to promote their cause, the societies even printed blank warrants to be issued to offenders, and specimens of the language to be used in the 'informations' to be given to the magistrates.<sup>24</sup> Societies prosecuted large numbers of offenders: an official report of their activity for 1720 stated that they had prosecuted 1,189 persons for 'Lewd and Disorderly Practices.' Describing the effects of their efforts for in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the report commented:

Great numbers of Bawdy-Houses, and other disorderly Houses, have been suppressed and shut up, and the Streets were very much purged from the wretched Tribe of *Night-walking Prostitutes*, and the most *detestable Sodomites*. Many young Men, taken with lewd Women, have, by their being brought to timely Shame and Punishment, have been discouraged and turned ... from following such sinful Courses.<sup>25</sup>

As the report suggests, the prostitutes (lewd women) are the agents of the corruption, seducing young men from the path of virtue.

To most historians, the reformation of manners campaigners articulated ideas about prostitution located within a discourse about adultery and sin of considerable historical longevity. Faramerz Dabhoiwala notes that campaigns against illicit sex were a 'commonplace of medieval, Tudor, and early Stuart policies,'<sup>26</sup> but also notes that these campaigns found their work increasingly difficult as the eighteenth century passed. Despite high-profile support from bishops and reformers, successive attempts to pass legislation against prostitution and brothelkeeping failed. Despite the vocal criticism of public vice, and the specific focus on urban prostitution, there was a considerable body of assent to, and toleration of, prostitution and brothelkeeping in the period. Bernard Mandeville (1670–

1733), with his usual complicated irony, proposed in his mock-treatise *A Modest Defence of Public Stews* (1724) that the aim of the reformers – the suppression of street prostitution – could be achieved more efficiently by the establishment of state-controlled brothels. These ‘publick stews’, he argued with suspiciously rational logic, would provide safe and clean working conditions for prostitutes, so lessening the ruinous effects of venereal disease and illegitimate children, as well as providing the service at a cheaper rate to clients.<sup>27</sup>

To some extent, Mandeville shared in the modernizing discourse of libertinism. James Grantham Turner, focusing on the Stuart to Restoration period, shows how libertine representational strategies in British literature and visual culture borrowed freely from Italian renaissance pornography, itself explicitly recalling the classical tradition.<sup>28</sup> Libertine discourse was in this sense self-consciously modern and European, linked to the empirical method of the new science and defiantly anti-clerical and republican in its politics. Libertine writing about sex championed the pursuit of erotic pleasure as a core activity of life (hedonistic, epicurean). Restoration and early eighteenth-century libertine representations of the prostitute, such as *The Wandering Whore* (1660), *The London Bawd* (1711) and *Satan’s Harvest Home* (1749) depict prostitution within scandalous sexual practices (such as sodomy or coprophagia), developing narratives of cuckoldry and adultery, and of prostitutes using their trade to criminal ends by defrauding or thieving from clients.<sup>29</sup> The common whore or wanton woman in the libertine verses of Rochester, such as ‘A Ramble in St James’s Park’, and Philip Gould’s ‘Love Given O’re’, is not only promiscuous, but also unchaste and without virtue, depicted as a rapacious female monster, criminal, raving, diseased and alcoholic.<sup>30</sup> In libertine literature, the demi-monde of prostitution has disruptive potential enough to be represented as completely depraved and outside society.

Yet if libertine discourse was self-consciously modern and revolutionary, libertine representation of prostitution also shared many of the same tropes as the discourse of religious campaigners of the period: that the prostitute was a body to be enjoyed and used, that her status was irretrievable and essentially disposable, that she was monstrously sexualized, consumed by lust, corruption and disease. Libertine discourse, more interested in consensual than mercenary fornication, encouraged a view of the prostitute as a lusty enthusiast rendered monstrous, diseased and criminal by her activities. By exploding the coy language of orthodox religious discourse, the libertine liberated himself to enjoy polymorphous sexual encounters; but as he did so, his actions reincarcerated the prostitute in the prison house of misogyny. Even in the polite ‘pornotopia’<sup>31</sup> of Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, in which both the prostitute’s sex work is clean, safe, healthy and pleasurable, and the language of the novel abjures sexual vulgarity, the echo of the lustful libertine whore can be seen. Although Cleland depicts his heroine Fanny Hill as a sex worker who finds her self and prosperity through prostitution, libertine literature was not liberationist.

## Historiography of Prostitution

In recent decades, a consensus has emerged in the Anglophone historiographical tradition, that the eighteenth century witnessed profound changes in the representation of prostitution. The period is a transitional moment that operates as a hinge between the pre-modern and modern worlds of sexuality. The historically enduring account of the prostitute in the early modern period sees her as an agent of corruption, a libertine seducer of men and a fornicating sinful adulteress, inhabiting a violent world of excessive consumption, insatiable desire, criminal behaviour and bestial depravity. In the course of the eighteenth century, although the legacy of the sinful prostitute remains apparent, a new, sentimental, construction of the prostitute emerges, transforming the prostitute from a criminal to a victim, from an agent of sin to an object of compassion. In the battles over the meaning and representation of prostitution, as Laura Rosenthal has argued in *Infamous Commerce* (2006), in the eighteenth century 'prostitution took on its modern form'. The key to this transformation is the new language of commerce and sensibility, central to the eighteenth-century gendered transformation of manners identified by historians and critics such as Nancy Armstrong, G. J. Barker-Benfield, and Randolph Trumbach.<sup>32</sup> In this view, a polite and civilized commercial society established a new ideal of domestic femininity as a model for the polite reformation of manners. As Emma Clery has argued, this places the construction of femininity at the centre of the properly philosophical debates over the nature of the commercial impetus in eighteenth century capitalism.<sup>33</sup> In his novels, for example, Richardson provided a powerful emblem of women as the embodiment of virtue and agent of moral reform. The case of the prostitute, a woman with a different kind of interaction with commerce and virtue, provides a telling test case for the articulation of this new discourse on femininity.

The 'modern' or 'new' prostitute was articulated in the discourse of sensibility, although of course sympathy for the plight of prostitutes can be traced back to the early eighteenth century, in for example *The Spectator*. In the sentimental mode, prostitutes could be represented as objects of passive distress, and as such, appropriate objects of benevolent concern and reformation.<sup>34</sup> This reconceptualization took place against concerted opposition: the prostitute remained a recalcitrant object of benevolence for numerous reasons, not least historically enduring discursive formations, and most obviously, their real-life resistance to polite culture. Research in recent decades has argued that in the mid-century, the prostitute is redrawn as an object of pity, as a victim of a corrupting seducer, and as such an unwilling subject of the underworld of brothels, streetwalking and disease.

The single most spectacular sign of the re-evaluation of the construction of the prostitute in eighteenth-century England was the establishment of the Magdalen Hospital in London in 1758, the subject of two essays in this volume. This was an innovative institution: a charitable foundation established to pro-

vide a reformatory refuge for distressed women who were either prostitutes or who had no recourse except prostitution. As an early anonymous defender of the charity suggested, the work of the Magdalen Hospital began with a revolutionary shift in attitudes to the prostitute: 'Tho' the profession of a prostitute is the most despicable and hateful that the imagination can form; yet the individuals are frequently worthy objects of compassion'.<sup>35</sup> The properly philosophical aspect of the hospital, explored in their foundational debates, promotional literature, and in creative responses, was its reorganization of the narrative of prostitution, which in their mind no longer ended in poverty, disease and death, but was reimagined with a new conclusion, that saw the reformed prostitute pass through the hospital's self-incarceration to achieve, in the status of the Magdalen, a form of penitence and reformation, so that she might finally be restored to passive domestic servitude in the world of the virtuous. Rescripting the narrative of prostitution translated the prostitute from aggressive moral criminal to innocent victim, and as such, an appropriate object of compassion and benevolence.

Historical analysis of prostitution in eighteenth-century France has in recent decades made a similar transition, and is increasingly studied through surviving archival evidence, rather than on the impressionistic commentary of contemporaries. An important set of studies by Erica-Marie Benabou, Colin Jones and Alain Corbin made use of archival evidence from police and court records to establish both official and unofficial attitudes to prostitution.<sup>36</sup> Benabou suggests that the regulation of prostitution began in Paris in the eighteenth century, with the consequence that it became more institutionalized and more professional, leaving more and more detailed records in the archive. Colin Jones's doctoral research in the 1970s used archival records to reconstruct the regulatory regime and official attitudes to prostitution in Montpellier, in Languedoc, between the mid-seventeenth century and the fall of the Ancien Régime.<sup>37</sup> He begins by noting the alarm felt at the rise of prostitution in the late seventeenth century: and argues this is caused by a rise in poverty and the collapse of systems for the relief of poverty after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He notes a series of government measures in the 1680s that were aimed at tighter regulation and repression of 'female sexual deviancy': (i) legislation passed between 1684 and 1687 that tackled the problem of prostitutes following the army; (ii) royal ordinances in 1684 that gave the heads of well-born families new powers to detain children, especially young women, who had disgraced or dishonoured their families; (iii) the establishment of specialist correctional institutions within the *hôpitaux généraux* for the detention and correction of public prostitutes, along with other 'crimes of poverty', such as pauperism, begging, vagrancy, foundlings, gypsies and lunatics.

Jones examines in some detail the foundation in 1692 of a specific institution in Montpellier, created within the *hôpitaux généraux*, for the reception of

'girls and women of scandalous and notoriously debauched life.'<sup>38</sup> The Bon Pasteur ('Good Shepherd') was supported by the wealthy elite in the city, and served as a house of correction until the Revolution. The institution was supported by wider networks of volunteer policing, which were arguably analogous to the societies for the reformation of manners campaigns in London. The regime of the Bon Pasteur included spiritual instruction, and was aimed at restoring the reformed prostitute to productive labour (analogous to the ideals if not the practice of the Magdalen Hospital). Jones describes the hospital as lying clearly within 'the main-stream of Counter-Reformation thinking about charity.'<sup>39</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the charitable impetus that had maintained the institution was waning, and it was increasingly forced to support itself from the forced labour of its inmates working in basic textile trades.<sup>40</sup> This was reflected in the institutions' attitudes to its inmates, which increasingly understood prostitutes as criminals whose reintegration into society was not to be achieved by moral reform but punitive confinement.<sup>41</sup> The more punitive regime also encouraged more sustained and invasive policing by the authorities, and in this way, more extensive records of prostitution. Among these records are extensive evidence that in the mid-century, police inspectors tolerated and protected the operation of a significant number of brothels, although only those which were well ordered and frequented by polite clientele. As Norberg's essay in this volume testifies, police records systematically noted the habits, appearance, social status and sexual activities of the clientele, and of the sex workers employed there.<sup>42</sup>

Benabou provides a broader survey of police practices and policies in her study of prostitution – initially examining the changing legal framework relating to prostitution throughout the eighteenth century, and then reconstructing the more pragmatic structures of policing and surveillance (*la police des mœurs*). She includes a series of case studies based on archival evidence surrounding specific individuals and their collaborations and interactions, including several important players within the police hierarchy (for example, lieutenant général Sartine, specialist police inspectors Meusnier and Marais); various well-known procuresses (for example, La Gourdan); and a number of individual prostitutes of different types. Her work consistently brings out the arbitrariness of the justice meted out to prostitutes, and in particular the one-sided nature of the punishment of 'vice' – that is, the systematic punishment of venal women rather than their clients. She also explores the ways in which the policing of prostitution was periodically used as a weapon against elements of the clergy.

While examinations of the institutional contexts of repression – police, hospitals, prisons – forms an important facet of historical writing on the topic of prostitution in eighteenth-century France,<sup>43</sup> another important/critical strand is the cultural-historical investigation of how prostitutes and prostitution became a key trope in political debates and controversies in the years preceding the

revolution. The works of Sara Maza on scandalous court cases; Pamela Cheek on actresses and 'public women'; Robert Darnton on the publishing trade and 'philosophical sex'; and Chantal Thomas on pamphlet representations of Marie Antoinette,<sup>44</sup> amongst others, have foregrounded the ways in which the figure of the prostitute was increasingly used polemically – as a vehicle for the critique of aristocratic lifestyles, or for devastating attacks on specific individuals, especially women perceived as wielding too much power (Madame de Pompadour, Madame du Barry, Marie Antoinette). The representation of the prostitute as a monstrous seductress, an emancipated woman riven by insatiable desires, in a range of different discourses and media, thus brings together powerful cocktail of assumptions and prejudices regarding class and gender, whose consequences were played out at the highest levels of politics. Unlike the historiographical tradition associated with British culture, then, historical writing focusing on prostitution in the French context seems not to have produced a clear overarching narrative regarding the emergence or increasing dominance of the sentimental construction of the prostitute as victim over the course of the century. While such forms of representation were undoubtedly important in France too,<sup>45</sup> the prostitute as dangerous libertine remained as dominant a figure as her sentimental counterpart.

### Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century Culture

The chapters in this book traverse historical, cultural and literary studies. As they do so, they remind us of what might be called the 'reality deficit' in many eighteenth-century representations of prostitution. Prostitution was throughout the eighteenth century a significant cause for concern by authorities and regulators, who read in the visibility of prostitution, for example, important evidence of the city's corruption. Responses to prostitution by moral campaigners and representations of prostitution by literary writers and visual artists reinforced the scandal occasioned by the sex work of prostitutes, whether street whores or noble courtesans. Yet despite the significance of prostitution in eighteenth-century writing, both polemic and imaginary, there is little evidence that it made much difference to the lives of the prostitutes themselves. Tim Hitchcock suggests that 'there is very little necessary relationship between the way sex, sexuality and in this case prostitution worked and the intellectual and social discourses constructed around them'.<sup>46</sup> In everyday life, there was significant toleration for, and acceptance of, the presence of prostitutes in the streets, even if their sex work was demonized and stigmatized in almost all official discourse.

The book is organized into four major sections. The first brings together four articles exploring the textual constructions of four 'venal' women who were real historical figures: from the French adventuress Marie Petit and the aristocratic Duchess de Mazarin, to the middle-class brothel-owner Mme Dossement, and working-class whore Sally Salisbury. These articles, which focus on various

forms of memoirs, biographies and other textual fragments, explore how some of these women chose to present themselves, through forms of self-fashioning that consciously (or unconsciously) relate to existing literary models, or created them. Others left no voice of their own. Their appropriation by others – telling and reworking their stories, sometimes ostensibly from their own perspective – for a variety of purposes, similarly points to the complexities of textual mediation, and the agendas at stake in these elaborate reinscriptions. In each case, the question of these women's 'venal' status, and the meaning of this designation, is affirmed, contested and debated. This problem of definition is also explored in the article which opens the section, which examines a series of classificatory schema by which different types of venal women are brought together in texts by Rétif de la Bretonne and Louis-Sébastien Mercier, suggesting that at the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of the 'prostitute' could be used as an overarching category despite the elusiveness of this term. The relationship between Rétif's and Mercier's hierarchies of prostitutes and questions of social rank and class that are discussed here, provides a useful counterpoint to the narratives of and by such different classes of venal women examined in the following articles.

The second section of the book brings together articles dealing with texts and images that were more explicitly fictional, mainly in the French context. The theatricality of the prostitute's art and her dangerous visibility – her appearance before the public eye – are explored through the analysis of a range of media. The literal elision between actress and prostitute is examined and problematized in relation to erotic plays written for the private theatre of the notorious actress Sophie Arnould, while the question of visual pleasure is explored in relation to perhaps the most iconic of eighteenth-century images of the prostitute: William Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*. Two further articles explore literary 'figures' of the prostitute: the intertextual links between Voltaire's Paquette in *Candide* and various French and English antecedents are traced out, to suggest the originality of Voltaire's rewriting, while Sade's Juliette is reread in the light of recent theoretical work on capitalist 'neo-managers': each of these articles, in different ways, bringing out, or embodying, a rereading produced by the confrontation of different cultures.

The third section considers further the theme of seduction and prostitution in sentimental discourse on prostitutes, especially that aroused by the debate on a public charity for the relief of distressed prostitutes. In this section, the two articles by Jennie Batchelor and Mary Peace, focus on texts and debates engendered by the Magdalen Hospital in London in the 1750s and 1760s, the most significant example of the sentimental reorganization of discourse on prostitution. Each article brings out the way in which discourse on prostitution is inseparable from (and indeed, despite its apparent marginality, comes to figure)

wider debates on marriage, motherhood and the possibility of redemption and social reintegration following sexual misconduct.

The book's final section opens out some wider perspectives. Both articles are written from a social-historical perspective, and each interrogates a range of juridical sources. In the first, Johanne Bergkvist develops a particular case study using eighteenth-century police records for Christiania (Oslo), the capital city of Norway, exploring the changing attitudes to work and poverty in the civic authorities' response to prostitutes. Randolph Trumbach offers a groundbreaking study of the history of the male prostitute in England in this period. As Trumbach's article reminds us, prostitution was also practiced by men, not only as clients willing to pay for sexual encounters, but also as practitioners, willing to engage in sexual acts, such as sodomy, for money. His article thus reminds researchers that the habitual use of the feminine pronoun for the prostitute, and the masculine for the client, is hasty: early modern prostitution is more complicated than that.

These four sections, individually and together, interrogate and articulate the highly contested fictions of the 'venal body', in all their heterogeneity. This diversity (the juxtaposition of representations of prostitutes in different discourses, different national contexts, and at different moments of the eighteenth century), allows us to complicate traditional historical schemas – both at the level of individual cases, and of national grand narratives – for example, concerning the eighteenth-century reformist discourse and its transforming of the prostitute from a vicious and sexualized criminal into a reluctant victim of commercial depravity. After all, the life of a prostitute on the streets of London or Paris in the late eighteenth century was no better than at the beginning. Discourse was distant from everyday life. The essays in this book recognize the recalcitrant particularity of the world of the prostitute, and the complicated, sophisticated, and elastic discourses that scripted their production as objects of debate and creativity.