THE FAMILIAR COMPANION OF COURTIZANS: PROSTITUTION, DISEASE AND DISORDER IN EARLY MODERN LONDON

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses legal, medical and literary sources to explore the relationship between prostitution and venereal disease in early modern London. I argue that while the actual practice of prostitution probably changed very little between the later medieval and the early modern period, attitudes toward prostitutes did undergo a significant change. In the Middle Ages prostitutes were reviled for their lust and venery, but representations of whores were not monolithically negative. In the early modern period, prostitutes were condemned as the archetype of the disorderly women, lustful and venal to be sure, but also loud, vulgar, infertile and diseased. By the end of the seventeenth century, representations of prostitutes became even more negative, eventually depicting them as deceptive and aggressive predators who not only sought to seduce their clients but to destroy them. I suggest that it is likely that the representation of prostitute as predator is a result of the close association between prostitutes and venereal disease. In the Middle Ages, meddling with a harlot might bring a man disgrace, but in the early modern period it could bring pain, humiliation, poverty and death.
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INTRODUCTION

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were periods of significant social, political and religious upheaval in England. During this time the country underwent an anti-papal reformation under Henry VIII and a Protestant reformation under his son Edward VI, followed by a Catholic counter-reformation under Mary and finally an uneasy Protestant settlement under Elizabeth I. The reigns of the early Stuart kings brought political conflict between the monarch and parliament, culminating in the English Civil War. As a result of these and other developments including rapid population growth, increased migration from rural counties into urban areas and ever-expanding numbers of transients, a variety of social forces were unleashed onto English society. A phenomenon that is linked to almost all of these changes and is perhaps one of the least well-explored topics of this period is urban prostitution.\footnote{John Guy, Tudor England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); John Pound, Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1971); Christopher Hill, A Century of Revolution 1603-1714 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982); Mark Kishlansky, A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714 (London: Penguin Books, 1996); Eamon Duffy, Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-1580 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Christopher Haigh, English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Patrick Collinson, The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).}

Currently, there is a paucity of direct evidence of the lives and livings of urban prostitutes. There was little legislation pertaining specifically to prostitution and the
extant legal records are often vague and incomplete, giving us only a slim indication of the nature and extent of prostitution during this period. As a result, with the exception of recent contributions by Paul Griffiths on youth culture, prostitution and London’s Bridewell as well as Faramerz Dabhoiwala on the patterns of sexual immorality in London, there has been little in-depth historical analysis of early modern English prostitution, leaving numerous lacunae. The goal of this paper then is to describe prostitution in Tudor and Stuart London and to explore some of the public discourse with which it was surrounded.

In discussing the public discourse surrounding prostitution, I will draw on a variety of literary sources that were available to a wide-ranging audience in early modern London. These sources include plays, pamphlets, ballads, sermons, medical treatises and prescriptive literature. Although the use of literature as a historical source can be a questionable practice in that literature does not necessarily present a realistic portrait of the subjects it describes, in recent decades cultural historians and new historicists have begun to legitimize this methodology to historians and literary critics alike. Stephen Greenblatt, a pioneer of new historicist scholarship, emphasizes that even those texts that are not typically seen as literature such as letters and diary entries,

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can still be read "with all the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts."¹
Likewise, renaissance scholar Lisa Jardine has suggested that the partnership of
literature and history is constructive and will allow scholars in both fields to "deepen
our understanding of both history and texts."²

Historians may benefit from the influence of these literary scholars in that
contemporary literature can help to illuminate the assumptions, influences and ideas that
constituted early modern English culture. Bearing in mind that audience members of
different genders, social orders, geographic origins and religious orientations would
likely have had different perspectives, we can not know with certainty how these visual
and verbal representations were received, interpreted or reinterpreted by the audience.
Nonetheless, it would be foolhardy to dismiss popular literature as unhistorical, because
despite this difficulty, it undoubtedly made up part of the early modern world and its
consideration can only further our understanding of sixteenth and seventeenth century
culture and society.

Cultural historian Frances Dolan has admirably demonstrated the utility of
literature as a historical source. In her book Dangerous Familiars, Professor Dolan
presents a careful and thorough account of the availability and price of texts, readership,
literacy and illiteracy as well as access to printed materials.³ Dolan joins Margaret
Spufford and Tessa Watt in asserting that because printed materials were readily

² Frances Dolan, Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700
available and relatively inexpensive that “in London, a wide, varied group of spectators and readers had access to ephemeral entertainment.” Furthermore, Dolan uses these texts; not to demonstrate literal reality, but rather to explore how representations shaped and were shaped by cultural forces such as gender, patriarchy and privilege.

As one of the more sordid aspects of social history, prostitution has only recently begun to receive the attention from historians that perhaps it deserves. In part, this is likely due to a lack of direct evidence. The women who practiced prostitution professionally or on a sporadic, temporary basis were largely members of the lower orders and as such were unlikely to have known how to write, let alone leave any memoir or personal account of their experience. Although prostitutes left traces in the records of both secular and ecclesiastical courts, these documents are incomplete and are often slim on detail and heavily mediated. Therefore, the evidence we have for prostitution during this period is largely indirect. In order to formulate an early modern model of London prostitution I have “cast wide the net” in search of source material, gathering “traditional” historical sources like diaries, journals, sessions records, sermons, pamphlets and proclamations. In addition, I have collected a variety of what

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might be considered literary sources, including plays and ballads, or the type of street ephemera which would have been widely available to members of almost every level of society. Finally I have also sought to approach prostitution through works that address it only indirectly. For this I turned to the multitude of medical texts and handbooks that proliferated from the end of the sixteenth century onward. Although much of the information here is fragmentary and perhaps even fictional, it is my contention that an analysis of diverse cultural discourses can help us to discern how prostitution was understood during this period as well as the conflicts and contradictions inherent in its existence.

Although my initial goal is to present a model of early modern prostitution as compared to the medieval model as suggested by Ruth Mazo Karras, my primary interest is exploring attitudes toward prostitution as revealed in public discourse. As Karras has argued, women were seen on a spectrum of lust and venality, prostitutes merely represent the most extreme end of the spectrum. Therefore, attitudes toward prostitutes and representations of whoredom may have had an impact on all women. Furthermore, beginning in the early modern period, whores were not only seen as lustful and venal but also as physically corrupted by disease, further impacting the perception of all women. The study of prostitution is not confined within the history of sexuality; it also touches on related fields including gender, religion, crime, and medical, political, economic, cultural and social history. Because it is a nexus of so many different elements, prostitution can be considered a significant element of Tudor-
Stuart urban society and an important contributor to our general understanding of early modern London.

In order to establish the function of prostitution in early modern urban society, it is necessary to begin with its medieval predecessor. Ruth Mazo Karras is one of the foremost historians of medieval English prostitution having published the seminal work on the subject and numerous articles and reviews and therefore it is with her conclusions that this study will begin. In the first chapter I will explicate what I will call the ‘Karras model’ of prostitution. I will discuss its theoretical basis, structure, legal status and function as delineated by Professor Karras. This will provide the foundation on which the following two chapters will be based.

The second chapter will contain a description of early modern urban prostitution gleaned from a variety of sources including legislation, legal records, medical treatises, diaries, sermons, homilies and works of philosophy. I will also make use of the work of several historians whose work on prostitution and illicit sexuality contributes to this study. In this way I will be able to observe changes and continuities in structure of prostitution and its relationship to the urban community between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of early modern period. In addition I will attempt to identify questions and areas that bear further exploration.

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10 While the demarcation between historical periods is subject to debate, for the purposes of this paper I am assigning the shift to the start of the reign of Henry VIII.
The third chapter will contain a discussion of the response to changes in prostitution as they appeared in contemporary public discourse including pamphlets, plays and ballads. I will further examine representations of prostitution and its impact on society as presented in popular literature over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I argue that prostitutes were no longer condemned merely for excessive lust but for their diseased and unnatural bodies. By the end of the period, prostitutes came to be seen as predators whose activities might be devastating to men, the family and society at large.

The practice of prostitution did not undergo a significant alteration in structure, but after the suppression of the stews in 1546 the threat posed by the expansion of prostitution from the suburbs to the city of London led to a new perception of prostitution as a threat to the fabric of society that was intensified by the association of prostitutes with venereal disease. In the face of insufficient and inefficient legal measures to prevent women from prostituting themselves and men from patronizing them, there occurred a shift in public discourse in which a metaphor of disease emerged to describe prostitution and its impact on society. In the Middle Ages whores were believed to threaten community values through their lust, however in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the whore becomes more overtly threatening in her both her lust and her association with disease. Ultimately the goal of this study is to develop a new model of prostitution for the early modern period that will provide a bridge between that of the Middle Ages and the modern period. This will help to provide a foundation for further research and also suggest areas of the field that have yet to be explored.
CHAPTER 1

THE KARRAS MODEL OF MEDIEVAL PROSTITUTION

Ruth Mazo Karras is recognized as having conducted one of the first serious examinations of medieval English prostitution. In *Common Women* Karras takes issue with historians who have portrayed prostitutes solely as victims of the oppressive patriarchal system or focused completely on their agency to the exclusion of the economic, social and cultural contexts which constrained their opportunities. Instead, Karras prefers to “find a balance between the history of oppression and the history of achievement,” while continuing to see the existence of prostitution as a result of a culture which privileges male sexuality, while marginalizing women who provided an outlet for that desire.\(^1\) Since its publication, *Common Women* has become the standard text on Medieval English prostitution and has been cited in several recent works on gender and sexuality in England.\(^2\) Therefore, in this chapter I will explicate the Karras

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\(^1\) Karras, 8.

model of prostitution in order to identify the changes and continuities between medieval and early modern prostitution.

Two central questions govern Ruth Karras' investigation of medieval English prostitution. First, what place did prostitution hold in society and how did it function? Second, how did the existence of prostitution impact gender relations in medieval England? The goal of this chapter is to situate Karras' thesis within the historiography of prostitution, discuss the major points and evidence for her argument and in doing so review the "Karras Model" of medieval prostitution. This model may then serve as a baseline against which to compare the changes and continuities between medieval and early modern prostitution.

The study of prostitution presents a number of challenges to historians, the first and foremost being how to define prostitution and delineate its perimeters. Because both secular and ecclesiastical definitions of prostitution have been fluid and maddeningly imprecise throughout most of western European history, how we define prostitution is central to our understanding of its nature and function in society. As a result, students of each historical period have been at pains to determine the activities that constituted prostitution and those persons who could be categorized as prostitutes. The primary historiographical question that must be addressed is whether the criterion that distinguishes prostitutes from other sexually active women is their level of
promiscuity or their acceptance of financial remuneration in exchange for sexual services.\footnote{For the purposes of this thesis, I will be dealing only with female prostitution. Although male prostitution would provide an interesting and perhaps revealing comparison there is not enough evidence at this time to provide a sufficient basis of analysis.}


Vern Bullough worked under the premise that prostitution was a

“...Distinct form of extra-marital sexual intercourse characterized by being more or less promiscuous and notorious, was seldom without reward, and was a form of professional commercialization for the purpose either of intercourse or of other forms of sexual activities and alluresments, resulting in due time in the formation of a special type.”\footnote{Bullough, 2.}

Such a definition is overly broad and could incorporate almost all members of the sex trade including those who engage in sexual activity as well as those who promote or facilitate their transactions. Other proposals have been much more limited, classifying prostitution as an occupation which “involved casual sexual encounters with men for
cash payment.\textsuperscript{16} In this case prostitution is limited to those who actually engage in sexual activity and requires that those persons be economically compensated. Yet it is not clear that such a restrained definition can be accurately applied to either the early modern period or the Middle Ages.

Historians of medieval and early modern prostitution are faced with a more difficult methodological challenge than their counterparts in modern history in that understandings of prostitution during earlier periods are obscured by linguistic and legal vagaries. For instance, in his study of prostitution in medieval Dijon, Jacques Rossiaud identified more than six distinct terms for prostitute, varying in accordance with the location in which the act was solicited and performed as well as the economic status of the individuals involved.\textsuperscript{17} Rossiaud found that the women in the established municipal prostibulum were differentiated from women who solicited customers in the public baths or private rooms. In addition, filles communes publiques (common public prostitutes) were distinct from filles secrètes (clandestine prostitutes) who in turn were classified separately from cantonnieres (streetwalkers), clostières (‘cloistered’ prostitutes), the légères (‘easy’ women) and the vagabondes. Leah Lydia Otis pointed out in her study of medieval Languedocian prostitution the difficulties inherent in translating Latin texts that use the term meretrices. In Roman times a meretrices referred specifically to a professional public prostitute; however by the Middle Ages it came to

be used to imply simply a “loose woman.” ¹⁸ As we can see, linguistic challenges are further complicated by regional and temporal differences.

Ruth Karras’ methodology differs from her predecessors in that she consistently translates the word *meretrix* as ‘whore’ rather than prostitute, arguing that the term ‘prostitute’ is not broad enough to encompass the medieval understanding of *meretrix*, as the term did not necessarily involve monetary exchange. ¹⁹ Instead she suggests that ‘whore’ is an inclusive designation that more accurately represents medieval conceptions of prostitution and illicit sexuality, providing an important basis of comparison for historians of early modern prostitution. While Latin terminology is less of a problem during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nonetheless a wide variety of terms were used interchangeably to describe prostitutes, unmarried sexually active women and adulteresses, complicating any analysis of prostitution as a separate category from illicit sexual activity.

For the most part historical inquiries have concentrated on the legal status and changing attitudes toward prostitution during particular periods. One of the prime challenges of this type of analysis is that there was a profound difference between the official position of church and secular authorities on prostitution and the attitudes of everyday men and women. For the most part medieval states tolerated prostitution, citing St. Augustine’s acceptance of prostitution. Augustine argued that intercourse for any purpose other than procreation, even between a husband and wife, was equal to

¹⁸ Otis, 11.
fornication with a prostitute. Prostitution was justified on the grounds that if brothels were prohibited that it would “disturb and dislocate the social order,” society would be overcome with lust and sin.\textsuperscript{20} Thus medieval society inherited an ambiguous attitude toward prostitution from the early Christian fathers. This ambivalence is particularly true for England, which at various times alternately condoned or prohibited official municipal brothels.

In France, brothels were a more continuous feature of the medieval urban landscape. Both Jacques Rossiard and Leah Lydia Otis have conducted regional studies of prostitution in medieval France. Otis examined the development of prostitution as an urban institution in Languedoc during the high and late Middle Ages. She found that over the course of several centuries public policy in Languedoc underwent a significant shift in tone. During the twelfth century policy dictated where prostitutes could not live and work, and they were generally confined to specific locations. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries public policy became more positive in that it allowed for the creation of public brothels, designated areas in which prostitutes could trade and what clothing they should wear. In an effort to control disorder and protect ‘honest women’ from unwanted sexual advances or prevent them from being influenced by the lifestyle of professional prostitutes, over time these public brothels were condensed into a single municipal brothel which could be more tightly controlled by civil authorities.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{21} Otis, 111-113.
Rossiaud’s analysis of Dijonese sources is more complex in that he contextualizes prostitution within the history of mores and social control. He argued that in France during the medieval period, prostitution was considered a necessary evil, therefore church authorities condoned its use by unmarried men because prostitutes were seen as an acceptable outlet for male sexual release. Such attitudes continued even during periods of intense social, political or economic stress, yet after about 1400 the situation began to change. Here Rossiaud’s argument mirrors Otis’s in that both authors argue that at a certain point continental prostitution became institutionalized and municipal authorities encouraged men to patronize prostitutes as this was seen as less dangerous than the seduction or rape of burghers’ wives, daughters or servants.\textsuperscript{22}

In contrast to both Otis and Rossiaud, Ruth Karras examines medieval English prostitution from a feminist perspective in order to understand its nature and function. She analyzes the legal framework in which prostitution operated as well as the structures that allowed it to do so. Karras argues that the existence of prostitution profoundly influenced general perceptions of female sexuality. She further postulated that because prostitutes were outside the control of one particular man, be he a husband, father or master, these women were conceived of as being a distinct threat to the patriarchal social order.\textsuperscript{23} It is to Karras’ argument and the model she has proposed for medieval prostitution that this paper will now turn.

\textsuperscript{22} Rossiaud, 160-6. St. Augustine also considered prostitution a necessary evil, arguing that its elimination “if possible at all, would disturb and dislocate the social order.” Brundage, \textit{Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law}, 151.

\textsuperscript{23} Karras, 131-42.
Karras begins her book with a chapter on prostitution in medieval English law. England’s labyrinthine system of secular and ecclesiastical courts is particularly difficult to navigate because their jurisdictions were often contradictory and overlapping. Furthermore, because prostitution was never formally defined in law, it is a significant challenge to discover exactly what constituted appropriate and inappropriate female behavior and at what point unacceptable female sexual behavior could be classified as prostitution. In her effort to maneuver through these pitfalls, Karras divides the first chapter according to rural, urban and ecclesiastical courts.

In the first section, Professor Karras found that medieval urban legislation criminalized and punished prostitution without ever defining precisely what the term meant. Bawdry, for example, can be variously understood as one who procured prostitutes for others, who housed prostitutes, ran a brothel or merely allowed unmarried women to give birth in their home. Nonetheless, the courts meted out a variety of punishments to women whom they deemed to be prostitutes, or who were in any way connected to prostitution. For instance, women convicted of bawdry might have their heads shaved and be taken to the pillory accompanied by minstrels. Upon her second offense, a bawd would suffer this same punishment as well as an additional 10 days in prison. A third conviction of bawdry meant that the woman could be banished from the city entirely. The punishment for whoredom was similar to bawdry. Whores were forced to wear a striped hood and carry a white rod during a

24 Karras, 14.
procession that would carry them to a thewe, or a kind of pillory used for women. A second conviction meant that her time on the thewe would be extended while the punishment for a third offense dictated that her head be shaven and she be banished from the city. Such punishments were carried out in public and intended to shame convicts, however it seems unlikely that they were effective either in preventing recidivism or in deterring other women from the sex trade. This may have been particularly true for women who prostituted themselves out of economic desperation.

Beginning in 1393 London’s municipal authorities passed legislation that attempted to limit the area in which prostitutes could live and work to Cock’s Lane and the area on the south bank of the Thames known as Southwark. Such measures were justified on the basis of crime prevention and limitation of public disturbance. Karras made two important points regarding this legislation. First, that these ordinances used inclusive language, targeting not only prostitutes but also women believed to be of “immoral life.” Karras points out that neither of these loose designations have anything to do with the exchange of money, meaning that prosecution was not necessarily limited to professional prostitutes. Her second point was that due to its contradictory and confusing nature, much of this legislation was not always enforced. Karras believes that this indicates a deeper concern with the preservation of public order through the prosecution of only those women who created a disturbance rather than

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26 (Riley, 395)
27 Karras, 15.
28 Ibid. It should be noted that prostitution began to be legislated at approximately the same time Languedoc, Dijon and London.
29 Karras, 16.
actually attempting to prevent or punish prostitution in general. Yet the inclusive language used in the legislation meant that any woman whose sexuality became a public disturbance including women with multiple lovers or adulteresses could potentially be prosecuted under these ordinances.

Rural prostitution was often far more casual than its urban counterpart. Karras found very few presentments for prostitution in the records of the manorial courts. It is unclear whether this is because prostitution was not considered a major problem, if the preservation of order did not become a concern until after the fifteenth century or if manorial courts deferred these cases to the ecclesiastical courts. These conclusions mirror those of G.R. Quaife who observed in his study of early seventeenth century Somerset that many “public whores” were often barmaids or servants who supplemented their income through prostitution. Furthermore he found that “village whores” tended to keep a low profile and therefore were not targeted by local authorities. In contrast to Karras’ proposal however, Margaret Spufford has argued that concern with social control was not uniquely a development of the early modern period. Rather she contended that efforts at maintaining public decency centering on the regulation and punishment of illicit sexuality had also been a feature of rural life as

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30 Karras, 16-7.
31 Karras, 24-5.
33 Quaife, 152.
far back as the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{34} Clearly the problem of rural prostitution and illicit sexuality in rural communities bears further exploration.

In both rural and urban areas the ecclesiastical courts presided over by the local bishop had jurisdiction over moral offenses. In most cases neighbors were responsible for denouncing individuals whose behavior constituted a breach of morality or a public disturbance.\textsuperscript{35} The offender would then go through compurgation, a procedure that involved bringing a certain number of people of good character to court in order to testify on the offender's behalf. If this could not be done then the courts could demand restitution either through shaming rituals or monetary fines.\textsuperscript{36} Many of these features, including the church courts, endured into the seventeenth century. Karras found that the basis of prosecution for whoredom was often an individual's reputation or "common fame," meaning that for some women being perceived as a whore by one's neighbors could be as damaging as actually being a whore.\textsuperscript{37} Because prosecution was based on informal sources of information, women who were not careful to protect their reputations could be prosecuted for whoredom, regardless of whether they were professional prostitutes or had merely carried on an illicit sexual relationship.\textsuperscript{38}

In Karras's model of the legal framework governing medieval prostitution several basic themes emerge. First, prostitution was not clearly defined by either the

\textsuperscript{35} Karras, 26.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
secular or the ecclesiastical authorities and as a result prosecutions for whoredom were not necessarily limited to professional prostitutes. Second, punishments for prostitution indicate a certain amount of ambivalence on the part of authorities. Attempts to limit the area, in which prostitutes could live and trade, suggest a certain amount of tolerance for the practice. Women who evaded those boundaries risked a fine or humiliating punishment, yet as Karras points out it is unlikely that this would be enough to deter all women from prostituting themselves. Rather, Karras argues that these measures were not intended to hinder prostitution, but rather to preserve public order by preventing crime and protecting women (except prostitutes) from unwanted sexual advances. The inefficacy of legislation strongly suggests that civil authorities made a pretense of regulating commercial sex while at the same time ensuring that prostitutes remained easily accessible to male desires.\footnote{Karras, 30-1.} As we will see in chapter two, this ambivalence toward prostitution continued well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet with the foundation of institutions like London’s Bridewell, penalties began to be characterized as much by reform as by public shame.\footnote{For more on London Bridewell see Paul Griffiths, “Contesting London’s Bridewell, 1576-1580” in Journal of British Studies, Vol. 42, Number 3 (July 2003), 283-315.}

Karras devotes the second chapter of her book to a discussion of licit and illicit brothels. Although illicit brothels constituted the majority of bawdyhouses in medieval England, none the less Karras focuses almost exclusively on their institutionalized counterparts. She argues that because licit brothels were regulated, their examination can provide inferences about attitudes toward prostitution that can then be applied more
generally.\textsuperscript{41} It is also likely that there are far fewer sources pertaining to illicit brothels, limiting their accessibility to historians. As a result the bulk of the chapter addresses the regulations and institutions which governed licit brothels as well as their ownership and management.

In medieval England, brothels were common features in port cities such as Sandwich and Southampton, providing entertainment to the sailors, merchants and travelers who passed through these areas. The most infamous red-light district however was in the borough of Southwark located across from the city of London on the south bank of the Thames.\textsuperscript{42} Southwark came under London’s jurisdiction in 1327 although there remained a number “liberties” that were beyond the control of the sheriff of London and usually governed by a high-ranking clergymen.\textsuperscript{43} Because the governance of Southwark was both conflicting and decentralized, the area had long been a haven for a wide variety of criminals and ne’er do-wells.\textsuperscript{44} As a result Southwark became the preferred destination for outlaws and felons hoping to evade London’s legal arm. One of the many places these shady individuals might resort to were Southwark’s public brothels, commonly known as the stews.\textsuperscript{45}

Prostitution flourished all over Southwark, but was particularly prevalent within the liberty of the Bishop of Winchester. Karras maintains that the area was already

\textsuperscript{41} Karras, 35.
\textsuperscript{42} Although the \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} places the origins of the term “red-light district” in the early twentieth century, it has been used by Leah Lydia Otis to describe official areas in which Medieval municipal governments authorized prostitution. See Otis, 26-7.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{44} For a detailed discussion of Southwark’s jurisdictional history see: David J. Johnson, \textit{Southwark and the City} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 12-42. Also check Martha Carlin, Rendle and the Victoria History of Surrey.
notorious for prostitution when in the fifteenth century the Bishop decided to profit from the trade by legalizing and regulating the stews.\textsuperscript{46} While it would seem that this would conflict with a clergyman's spiritual prerogatives, Karras points out that the regulation of the stews fell under his duties as a temporal lord and was most likely handled separately from religious matters.\textsuperscript{47} A series of ordinances governing the stews has survived and this code forms the bulk of Professor Karras’ evidence of attitudes towards prostitution and female sexuality more generally during this period.\textsuperscript{48}

The two most important issues Karras addresses in this chapter are the justification behind many of the brothel regulations as well as brothel ownership and management. In her analysis of a fifteenth century customary of the Southwark stews, Karras takes a pointedly feminist position. The codes regulated women’s behavior, their living and working arrangements and provided them a certain amount of protection from unethical brothel keepers who might take advantage of their position. For instance, one regulation dictated that if any prostitute who wished to “leve her synne” and was held by the keeper against her will, than a bailiff had the authority to “avoyde the seide women oute of the seid lordship, without any lette or interrupcion of any grete householder of of his wife.”\textsuperscript{49} The customary also provided customers with protection from both prostitutes and keepers who might lure them into the house and then charge

\textsuperscript{45}Johnson, 33-35. 
\textsuperscript{46}Karras, 38. Johnson, 66. 
\textsuperscript{47}Karras, 41. 
\textsuperscript{49}Post, 423.
exorbitant rates for their services. Karras argues that such regulations were designed to limit women’s choices about their own sexuality and furthermore that they were intended to preserve public order by protecting both the prostitute and her customer.\textsuperscript{50} According to Karras the overall purpose of such regulations was to make women sexually available to men while at the same time keeping them strictly under patriarchal control.\textsuperscript{51} Karras’ position is that during the middle ages, order was a more central issue than morality. Therefore maintenance of social control required that all women who were not under the dominion of a particular man were considered a threat to order and as such had to be controlled by the civil authorities. Women who did not belong to one man, were then officially considered to be “common” to all men.

This is one of the areas in which Karras’ argument is weakened by her evidence. This chapter is problematic because it focuses primarily on institutionalized brothel keeping and gives very little attention to its illicit counterpart. This is particularly troubling because as Karras herself admits, licit brothels made up only a very small percentage of the commercial sex trade in most areas.\textsuperscript{52} This would mean that the customary that she uses to support her findings was not imposed on the majority of brothels in medieval England. As a result it is unclear how much credence we can lead to the conclusions which Karras has proposed based on unbalanced or unrepresentative evidence.

\textsuperscript{50} Karras, 40.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 41.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 35. Carlin, 209.
The second major point in this chapter concerns the ownership and operation of the brothels. As we have seen the Bishop of Winchester owned but did not directly participate in the operation of brothels under his jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{53} The bishop was a particular powerful individual holding high positions in both royal and ecclesiastical government and as a result was able to legalize prostitution within his liberty. Yet it is not clear how or why illicit brothels outside of Southwark were able to continue their operations despite their extra legal status. Karras suggests that the explanation behind this is that although wealthy citizens and landlords could not legalize prostitution, they could ignore laws with relative impunity.\textsuperscript{54} If her proposal were true then it would go a long way to explain the contradictory existence of prostitution and its continued fruition in the early modern period.\textsuperscript{55}

In the third chapter Karras explores the demographic patterns, origins, occupations and recruitment of prostitutes in medieval England. A woman's decision to become a prostitute was dictated by two related features of medieval society. First, the economic opportunities available to her, and second the current demographic situation. Prostitution became a necessity during periods in which economic opportunities for women were extremely limited. Women were excluded from many vocations and their participation was limited in others. At the same time, marriage was the norm for most

\textsuperscript{53} Carlin, 213-4.
\textsuperscript{54} Karras, 43.
\textsuperscript{55} Chapter 2 will discuss the issue of brothel ownership, management and patronage by wealthy or influential individuals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in more detail.
women. During periods of economic or demographic stress, not all women were able to marry, therefore prostitution often became viable solution.\textsuperscript{56}

There was no sharp break in demographic patterns between the medieval and early modern periods or from about 1350 to 1550. In most places, women tended to marry relatively late and went into domestic service prior to marriage. After the Black Death opportunities for women increased. By the beginning of the second half of the fifteenth century the wellspring of available vocations began to dry up, the age of marriage dropped, the birthrate rose, the labor supply increased and women began to be excluded from the labor market.\textsuperscript{57} Karras surmises that although not all unmarried women became prostitutes, the term “singlewoman” became a euphemism for prostitute during this period.\textsuperscript{58} While this is certainly plausible, other historians have pointed out that while certain numbers of not-married women supplemented their income with prostitution, in reality a far higher percentage were able to support themselves through other means such as victualling or brewing.\textsuperscript{59} If this were the case then it would cast doubt on Karras’ suggestion that men were uncomfortable with unmarried women and felt it necessary to stigmatize them as a result.\textsuperscript{60}

Karras also examines medieval discussions and representations of prostitutes, as they appeared in pastoral texts, saint’s lives, sermons and devotional literature. She

\textsuperscript{56} Karras, 48-9.
\textsuperscript{58} Karras, 52. See also: Post, 423; Stow, 371. This term was used in the fifteenth century customary as a synonym for prostitute and similarly by John Stow in 1598, it is not known if its usage was widespread.
\textsuperscript{59} Bennett, 37-43.
argues that although the medieval church did not have a well-defined position on what it meant to be a whore, two central characteristics dominate representations of prostitutes in the church’s teachings; i.e. sexual immorality and venality.\textsuperscript{61} This is significant because although all women were seen by the church as inherently lustful, prostitutes exemplified the extreme end of the spectrum, which suggests that attitudes toward prostitutes could inform attitudes toward women in general.

There are two aspects of Karras findings that are particularly important to point out when comparing medieval and early modern prostitution. First, in all of Karras examinations of medieval representations, prostitutes were seen as being a threat due to their uncontrolled lustfulness, which might tempt men to sin.\textsuperscript{62} Further, as Karras argues, whores were seen as veneral, and money-hungry. So whoredom was closely connected to financial exchange, which although obvious to modern sensibilities does not reflect medieval definition of prostitute as a woman who was had multiple sex partners or was available for the lust of many men. Therefore prostitutes and women more generally, were seen as dangerous to men because of their lust and greed. Notably Karras finds little mention of physical dangers such as disease or plague in her sources. As we shall see in chapter three, the association with prostitution and physical corruption will be one of the major developments in the early modern period.

In addition, Karras points out that the medial church’s representations of prostitutes were not monolithically negative. While the act of prostituting oneself was

\textsuperscript{60} Karras, 52. 
\textsuperscript{61} Karras, 102. 
\textsuperscript{62} Karras, 102-5.
deeply sinful, prostitutes themselves, most famously Mary Magdalene, had the potential to be redeemed. On the continent, although not in England, clergymen preached to and hoped to reform prostitutes.\textsuperscript{63} The church founded hospitals and convents specifically for repentant prostitutes and any prostitute who “devoted [herself] to the Virgin could be saved no matter what her sin.”\textsuperscript{64} After the English Reformation, veneration of female saints was discouraged and the possibility of redemption was no longer an option in Protestant England.

The model of medieval urban prostitution that Karras presents is one that is characterized by toleration and regulation. Brothels, particularly those in Southwark in the Bishop of Winchester’s Liberty were maintained and regulated by municipal authorities. As Karras has argued, medieval whoredom was not defined by the exchange of money for sex, but by the “commonness” of her body. Although the financial aspects of prostitution were recognized, it was not central to the definition of whoredom, meaning that almost any woman whose sexual behavior exceeded community values might be accused of whoredom, a possibility that would have serious consequences for a woman’s life and livelihood. Furthermore, and most importantly for this study, the primary dangers associated with prostitution were female lust and venery, which might corrupt men and seduce honest women into a life of immorality, not venereal disease and physical corruption.

\textsuperscript{63} Karras, 102. See also: Otis, 72, 75, 87-8
\textsuperscript{64} Karras, 117. Rossiaud, 36-7, 127; Trexler, 57-9; Vern L. Bullough, \textit{The History of Prostitution} (New York: University Books, 1964), 114-6; Otis, 72-6.
The break between the Middle Ages and the early modern period would seem to be an important one in the history of prostitution. Yet one might also question whether or not any significant change in the attitudes toward and practice of prostitution actually occurred. Karras argues that population surge of the sixteenth century heralded a "backlash against prostitution as moral standards changed." According to Karras, the early modern period saw a resurgence of moral reform that caused authorities to reject their earlier acceptance of the necessary evil argument, and persecute prostitutes more thoroughly, but early modern historians are not clear that this was the case. She loosely connects this backlash with religious and moral reform in both Catholic and Protestant countries, arguing that the church's teaching against prostitution was less vehement in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries then in the sixteenth. According to Karras, authorities considered the large number of unmarried women a threat to order and the lack of suitable economic alternatives for women only increased the perceived threat.

While it is true that municipally sanctioned and regulated brothels disappeared in parts of Italy and France during the first half of the sixteenth century, the precise reason behind the suppression of the stews in England is not yet known. This is an area that requires further scrutiny in order to identify the continuities and discontinuities in prostitution between these two periods. It is to these questions that the next chapter will turn.

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65 Karras, 53.
66 Karras, 53.
CHAPTER 2

AN EARLY MODERN MODEL OF LONDON PROSTITUTION

In 1549, Bishop Hugh Latimer exclaimed before an audience that included King Edward VI, "there is now more whoredom in London than ever there was on the Bank." Shortly before his death in 1547, Edward's father, Henry VIII had permanently suppressed the public brothels, collectively known as the stewes. Despite Henry's decree, prostitution continued to thrive, much to the dismay of individuals like Hugh Latimer who believed that prostitution contributed to the disorder and decay of London and its immediate vicinity. At approximately the same time, syphilis was introduced into England. Although it had been cause for concern in Europe for several decades, it is only at mid-century that there began to be serious discussion of the origin, prevention and treatment of the disease by English physicians. From the very beginning, the medical community associated prostitutes with the venereal malady. This chapter will examine the continuities and discontinuities between early modern prostitution from its medieval predecessor, describe its features, and determine what, if anything made it different from prostitution in the middle ages. In addition we will consider the

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impact of venereal disease on the cultural significance of prostitution. In this way we will be able to develop a distinctly early modern model of London prostitution.

Municipal authorities had nominally regulated medieval prostitution, but during the sixteenth century prostitution became less confined and more difficult for the authorities to monitor and control, a problem which was further complicated by the spread of an equally dangerous malady, i.e. syphilis. Many sixteenth century physicians considered sexual contact to be the primary method by which syphilis was transmitted. Ulrich Von Hutten addressed the issue of infection in his treatise, *Of the Wood called Guaiacum That Healeth the Frenche Pockes*, first published in English in 1539. Von Hutten, himself a syphilitic, wrote that infection “especially happeneth by copulation….” And that “the more that man is gyven to wantonness, the sooner he is infected.” By 1596 William Clowes specifically blamed “common harlots” for the infection and throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century commentators continued to condemn “damn’d prostitutes” for the spread of venereal contagion.

In Italy and Spain, governments took steps to halt the spread of syphilis, which often meant closing brothels and monitoring prostitutes for the disease. In Venice during the 1490’s the Council of Ten empowered the Provveditori alla Sanita to control the movement of prostitutes and in the 1560’s the Spanish royal government stipulated

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that Seville’s municipal brothels were to be inspected by medical doctors every eight days for signs of disease among the inhabitants.\footnote{Guido Ruggiero, \textit{Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49-51; Mary Elizabeth Perry, \textit{Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 137.} Even the Scots took action against prostitutes to combat syphilis in a 1560 act which required all whores “whether infected or not” to be banished from the towns and suburbs.\footnote{Linda Mahood, \textit{The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century} (London: Routledge, 1990), 20-1.} Although there is no direct evidence that concern over the pox was the impetus behind the Henry VIII’s 1546 proclamation, it is noteworthy that the suppression of Southwark’s municipal brothels was nearly contemporaneous with anti-prostitution measures taken by its continental counterparts. It is interesting that on the continent and even in Scotland official measures were undertaken to address and prevent venereal disease, but in England there was no such formal action.

Although most contemporaries believed that they understood how the pox was transmitted, its origin remained a source of some contention. In 1539, Ulrich Von Hutten declared that “in our tyme sycknesses shul’d aryse, which were to our forefathers (as it maye be wel coniectured) unknown.” He believed that syphilis had been unknown in Europe 1493.\footnote{Guido Ruggiero, \textit{Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49-51; Mary Elizabeth Perry, \textit{Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 137.} In 1546, the Italian poet and physician Fracastoro published his medical treatise \textit{De Contagione et Contagiosis Morbis Et Eorum Curatione, Libri III} in which he claimed that syphilis had been unknown in Europe prior to Columbus’s journey to the new world. He indicated that the disease had become widespread in Italy by 1500, shortly after the French King Charles VIII’s occupation of
Naples. The next year, Andrew Borde reported that "the grecions can nat tell what this sicknes doth meane wherfore they do set no name for this disease for it dyd come but lately into Spayne & Fraunce and so to us about the yere of your lorde. 1470." Forty years later William Clowes confirmed Fracatoro’s opinion, writing that "in the yeere of our Lord God, 1494. In the month of December, when the French King tooke his jorney to recover the kingdom of Naples: at which time hapned amongst the soldiers and people, this disease to appeere." Yet by the end of the seventeenth century some physicians were equally likely to blame the introduction of syphilis to Europe directly on Christopher Columbus and his crew. One physician even commented that "methinks, 'tis a pity to affix the Title on the French and rob the Italians of that Honour; because 'twas first brought from the Indies by Columbus and Italian, and at Naples first shew'd it self to Christendome".

It is still unclear today when and how syphilis was first introduced into Europe, and modern scholars remain divided on the issue. Based on archaeological evidence some believe that it was in fact carried back to Europe from the Americas. In its later stages, syphilis can leave lesions on the bones that have been identified on the skeletal remains of pre-conquest native Americans. Similar lesions have yet to be found on the skeletal remains of Europeans buried prior to 1500, which might indicate that syphilis

73 Von Hutten, 1.
75 Borde, Fol. 87.
76 Clowes, 149.
77 L.S., 2. See also; Lowe, B1.
was unknown in Europe until the sixteenth century. Other scholars have argued based on textual sources that in fact syphilis existed in Europe prior to the “discovery” of the New World. Proponents of the latter theory have argued that because there are four distinct nosological entities or forms of the spirochete treponema pallidum (the bacteria that causes syphilis) it is possible that endemic forms of the disease could have been present in Europe in earlier periods. Nevertheless, there has not yet been any osteo-archaeological evidence found to support the “anti-American” theory.

Syphilis causes obvious physical destruction, signs of which frequently appear in sixteenth and seventeenth century popular literature in association with bawds, whores, and their clients, therefore it is important to understand how the disease develops, its symptoms and their impact on the human body. Anywhere from 10 days to a month after infection, a large painless chancre will appear on the site of infection. The sore itself is full of bacteria making it extremely contagious yet because it is painless and can often appear inside the rectum or the cervix, the victim may be initially unaware of the problem. Several months later, a variety of symptoms of secondary syphilis will appear. These may range from a rash, swollen lymph nodes, fever, sore throat, joint pain, headache, patchy hair loss and wart-like lesions in the genital area.

Early modern physicians like Fracastoro and Clowes would certainly have recognized

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79 Quetel, 40-1. Jacquart and Thomasset, 178.
the symptoms of primary and secondary stage syphilis as those of the French pox. Eventually however, even these symptoms would pass and the victim would enter the latent or tertiary stage. At this point syphilis bacteria begins to damage the sufferer’s major organs including the bones, liver, skin, heart, and brain.\textsuperscript{83} Although pre-modern physicians would have been familiar with these symptoms, their concept of physiology and treatment left much to be desired.

Mercury was the most popular treatment for syphilis during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and its administration tended to be expensive, time-consuming, and painful.\textsuperscript{84} Numerous physicians, quacksalvers, mountebanks, empirics and charlatans advertised their remedies, which were costly and therefore beyond the reach of the poorer sort of sufferer.\textsuperscript{85} To treat syphilis, physicians administered mercury in a variety of concoctions and treatments. Some physicians recommended mercury ointments that could be applied to the skin, while others recommended it be taken orally in or even injected into the nose, genitalia or any open sores.\textsuperscript{86} In many cases, mercury treatments caused nausea, frequent bowel movements, a swollen and sore throat, blackened gums or loose teeth. One common treatment involved “sweating” the patient in an effort to force the morbid humors out of the body. In this case the patient was anointed with mercury and enclosed in a draftless room near a fire. When the patient could no longer bear the heat, they would be swaddled in blankets and put to bed where the sweating continued. This type of treatment, which could take up to 35 days to

\textsuperscript{83} Marr, 288.
\textsuperscript{84} Beier, 88. Copeman, 130.
\textsuperscript{85} Quetel, 86-93; Arrizabalaga, Henderson, French, 28-32.
complete, caused salivation, diarrhea, vomiting, loose teeth and fetid breath; all signals to the physician that their remedy was "working."\textsuperscript{87} Many contemporary physicians mistakenly believed that their cures met with some success against the disease. But because syphilis goes through a number of different stages, many of the symptoms that physicians believed they had cured had actually disappeared on their own as part of the natural progression of the disease.

Given the devastating impact of venereal disease on the human body and its association with prostitutes and other loose women, it is not surprising that early modern authors infused their descriptions of prostitutes with pathologically oriented warnings. For instance, in 1583 Phillip Stubbes wrote in the \textit{Anatomie of Abuses} that "A woman thorow painting and dying of her face sheweth herself to be more then whorish. For (saith he) shee hath corrupted and defaced (like a filthy strumpet or brothel) the workmanship of god in her."\textsuperscript{88} Words like ‘corrupt' and ‘filthy’ during the early modern period had specific connotations. The word ‘corrupt’ might imply “infected or defiled from that which causes infection or decay,” while ‘filth’ contains an innuendo of venereal disease.\textsuperscript{89} For Stubbes, any woman who used make-up to cover or embellish her features was comparable to a whore, in that through artifice she had attempted to alter or improve the face that God intended for her.

\textsuperscript{86} Beier, 88.
\textsuperscript{87} Arrisabalaga, Henderson and French, 139-44; Quetel, 29-32; Copeman, 130.
\textsuperscript{88} Phillip Stubbes, \textit{The Anatomie of Abuses} (London, 1583), F.1.
Paint and make-up was not only seen as an insult to God’s handiwork but also as containing an element of deception.Prostitutes who had suffered from the pox or other physical ravages might cover their scars in order to feign health and fool would-be suitors. One balladeer wrote that “each lass she will paint her face/to seem with a comely grace/ and powder her hair/to make them look fair/ That Gallants, may them embrace:/ But every morning/before their adorning/ They’re far unfit for sale.” Thomas Coryat commented that the courtesans of Venise were known to “adulterate their faces” with paint, while the early seventeenth century author of The Crafty Whore wrote that harlots were “excellent good face-menders, they know how to embellish themselves with all the advantages of art.” Later in the century the anonymous author of The Whores Rhetorick observed that prostitutes “varnish over [their] imperfections, whether natural or casually acquired in the exercise of [their] own vocation.” In all of these descriptions prostitutes were accused of either polluting their faces through the use of paint or masking the physical ruin that had been acquired during their career. By revealing the whore’s artifice, authors not only hoped to entertain their readers but also to warn potential suitors of the dangers posed by prostitutes.

Despite the disorder associated with prostitutes and brothels, there were very few laws that specifically restricted their activity. As we have seen, during the Middle

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Ages some London prostitution was regulated, municipal brothels were confined to the suburbs and the dress and activities of their prostitutes were carefully regulated in order to distinguish them from “honest” women. During the early modern period however, these formal rules were no longer in force and technically prostitution was not licit anywhere in the capital. We need to know under what legislation did prostitution fall, how was it regulated, and how it operated during this period.

In 1546 Henry VIII ordered the Lord Mayor and sheriffs of London to

“Proclaim that the King, considering the dissolute and miserable persons who have been suffered to dwell beside London and elsewhere in places called the Stewes have lately so increased and engender such corruption among the people as to be an intolerable annoyance to the common wealth, youth being there allured to fleshly lusts, and evil disposed persons conspiring robberies, has with the advice of his Council decided to extinguish such abominable license.”

Evidently, Southwark’s rowdy reputation was known even to the king, yet it is still not known exactly what it was that provoked him to close the public brothels. It has been suggested that the suppression of the stews was a response to an epidemic of syphilis, however there is no direct evidence to support such a conclusion. From the proclamation’s wording it appears there was a perception that the stews had somehow become more crowded leading to an increase in crime and disorder. In response to this perceived increase in disorder the king was encouraged to declare that

“All persons who have been accustomed to abuse their bodies in such common places called the Stews in and about London shall depart thence before Easter next to their natural countries with bag and baggage.”

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Although such an announcement was intended to put a stop to whoredom in the capital, the Lord Mayor did not have the manpower to prevent prostitution.

Just three years after the stews were to have been suppressed and all the prostitutes were supposed to have been run out of the capital, Bishop Hugh Latimer gave a sermon before the young King Edward VI. In his sermon he declared that “I hear say that there is now more whoredom in London than ever there was on the Bank” and admonished the Lords in attendance to “hear of it and redress it.”\(^{96}\) There was little the Lords could do however, and prostitution continued to thrive in London. There is some indication that prostitution, although believed to engender disorder and corruption, received protection from figures at court and was only prosecuted when it became impossible to ignore or the citizenry complained.\(^{97}\) In one 1661 pamphlet, “Bonny Bette” a fictional prostitute bemoaned her lack of customers, claiming that she “dare not be too publick, lest like our dear sister Tory Rory, before’d to beat out my living at the Hemp-block.”\(^{98}\) This would suggest that it was not uncommon for prostitutes to be allowed to continue trading, as long as they didn’t become too much of a nuisance.

From contemporary accounts like Stow’s, as well as judicial records, we know that prostitution flourished in the capital long after the suppression of the stewes. It is not possible to know exactly how many prostitutes worked in the city and its suburbs because there was no census or other comparable record that might have recorded that

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\(^{96}\) Latimer, 114.
\(^{98}\) Peter Aretine, *Strange Newes from Bartholomew Fair, or, the Wandring-Whore Discovered* (London, 1661), 2.
information. In addition, many of the sources which are available are either anecdotal or they are taken from the transcripts of the ecclesiastical and secular courts, both of which tended to target only those women whose sexual behavior became a public nuisance. A further complication stems from the prosecution of prostitutes under a host of associated crimes including fornication, adultery and disorderliness, making prostitution a difficult activity to identify. Likewise, the appellation ‘whore’ was commonly applied to any women who disregarded community values. In many cases the transgressors were most likely ordinary women engaged in extra-marital relationships, or other sexual transgressions rather than commercial sex. Even if we were to attempt to quantify the number of prostitutes in London we would have no way to account for those women who were never caught up in the judicial net.

Further complicating this issue is the recognition that in the early modern period the definition of prostitution became more complex. As discussed in chapter one, in the Middle Ages a prostitute or “meretrix” was recognized as a “sinful woman,” or a woman whose body was available for public use but not necessarily a woman who received money in exchange for sex. Yet, in early modern London, prostitution began to be seen as a type of work. The sinful and disorderly connotations were not lost

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however, and prostitution began to take on some of the social and ethical ambiguity it is associated with today. Although the limitations of the sources and linguistic ambiguities prohibit a statistical analysis, they do lend themselves to a more qualitative approach.

In June of 1614 two known spinsters, Mary Townes and Mary Stevens were presented to the Middlesex sessions of the peace after having been “complained to be common whores.” Later that same year Katherine Johnson and Mary Guest, also spinsters, were brought before the sessions by the constable of Cow Cross for being common whores. According to Paul Griffiths, most prostitutes in early modern London were young, single women. Indeed, John Stow referred to the ladies who inhabited the Southwark stews as “single women” and as Ruth Karras pointed out, this term may have become a euphemism for ‘prostitute’ in the late Middle Ages. There was some concern that unmarried women, or women who were not under the control of a male family member might pose a threat to order. In fact, a section of the Statute of Artificers declared that women between the “age of twelve years and under the age of 40 years and unmarried and forth of service” should be compelled into service, so as to prevent them from becoming disorderly of their bodies.

There is evidence however that at least some prostitutes were married, and perhaps even assisted by their partners in their activities. For instance, in 1585 John

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103 Ibid., 175. Other spinsters presented for whoredom appear on pages 46, 73, 134, 193-4, 224, 226, 301.
Ward was presented to the church courts for “bearinge with his wife in hir whoredome; he knowinge the same.” It is not clear in this case if Goodwife Ward was in fact prostituting herself or whether she was merely carrying on an affair with her husband’s knowledge. Although Paul Griffiths categorized most prostitutes as young, unmarried women, Robert Shoemaker, Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson have suggested that prostitution may have been a means for women of all social levels to supplement their incomes at certain times in their lives. So although career prostitutes like Mary Stevens, arrested repeatedly in 1614 for being a “common whore,” were most likely to appear in the judicial records, for many women prostitution was what Faramerz Dabhoiwala has called a variation on the “economy of makeshifts,” or a temporary and informal form of support.

Bawds and bawdyhouse keepers appear in the records of the Middlesex sessions with as much frequency as did prostitutes. In 1615, Joan Sparkes, a spinster and “noted bawd” of Clerkenwell, was asked to give sureties for her good behavior. Later that year Margery Sharpe, also a spinster, was presented for “keeping suspected house[s] of bawdry.” Bawdry was a potentially lucrative venture, and in some cases keeping

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109 Le Hardy, 2, 73. Dabhoiwala, 94.
111 Ibid., 144. For additional examples see pages 238, 288. Le Hardy Vol.II, 46, 85, 175, 193.
might be an individual's primary source of income.Prostitutes might pay brothel keepers a weekly rent of 4s to 6s, however there is also evidence that some bawds received weekly rents up to thirty shillings in addition to a percentage of the client's fee. Yet bawdry could also be risky in that it was a frequent target for constables and other local officials who saw brothels and their keepers as centers of community disorder. Officers were directed to "arrest suspected persons, which walke in the night and sleepe in the day: or whiche do haunt any house, which is suspicious of baunderie." Such a fate befell Helen Browne in 1613 when she was "taken in a lewd house hidden in a dark cellar," and Geoffrey Barrfoot in 1614 when he was taken by the watch "in a noted bawdy house at midnight, there being three or four whores in the house."

While many of the people charged as "maintainers of houses commonly suspected to be houses of common Bawdrie" were unmarried women or widows, a significant number were men or husband and wife teams. For instance, Thomas Marcroft and his wife were presented in 1614 for keeping a bawdyhouse, and James and Jane Tanner who were suspected of bawdery in 1616, but were later discharged. Although some women worked with their husbands, other wives were alone charged with brothel keeping. For instance, Elizabeth, wife of William Dyer, was taken for

113 Griffiths, 45.
keeping a bawdy house, and Ann, wife of Cornelius Michellson, was presented for the same.\textsuperscript{117} In 1615 Barbara, the wife of Thomas Taylor was charged with “being a woman of ill life and keeping a suspected bawdy-house.”\textsuperscript{118} Evidently, Barbara Taylor was not pleased with the disruption of her home as she was also charged with “abusing the said headborough in his search in the night.”\textsuperscript{119} Despite this evidence that men as well as women could be bawds, nonetheless, bawdry was generally perceived as a female profession. As we shall see in the third chapter, contemporary popular literature frequently characterized bawds as deceitful, decrepit, and diseased old women.

During the middle ages and well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Southwark had a reputation for being a haven for ne'er-do-wells and other shiftless or disorderly persons.\textsuperscript{120} In 1595 the Privy Council recorded that

\begin{quote}
"wee have not found such success and effect of our direccions as wee expected, but do understand of the maintenance or rather increase of those abuses, and a great number of dissolute, loose and insolent people harboured and maintained in such and the like noysom and disorderly howses, as namely poor cottages and habitacions of beggars and people without trade, stables, ins, alehowses, tavernes, garden howses converted to dwellings, ordinaries, dicyng howses, bowling allies and brothell howses."
\end{quote}

Although replete with gaming houses, bear baiting rings and theatres, Southwark’s brothels were notorious centers of disorder on which John Stow commented in his

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 14, 251.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
famous *Survey of London*; the stews were designated for "the repair of incontinent men to the like women." 122 After the suppression of the public stews in 1546, one might have expected prostitution in and around London to decline. Instead suppression had the opposite of its intended affect and brothel houses began to pop up all over the city, causing Bishop Hugh Latimer to complain in 1549 that "you have put down the stews: but I pray you what is the matter amended? What availeth that? Ye have but changed the place, and not taken the whoredom away."123 The suppression of the public brothels also figured into John Taylor’s poem entitled *A Whore* in which he wrote that "Till the eight Henry banish’d them away: And since those common whores were quite put down, A damned crue of private whores are growne, So that the divell will be doing still, Either with publique or with private ill."124

The Privy Council’s description of brothels as houses of disorder may not be far from the truth. In 1613 Thomas Chambers was taken in a bawdy house where he abused the officers, assaulted a "a raker of Shorediche" and later was so intoxicated he was "not able to speeke a worde before the Justice."125 In 1615 William Burch, an apprentice grocer, was accused of taking part in a convoluted scheme to rob his master. Apparently, William Pryme, a cook, gave a "charm" to a woman named Elizabeth Tue who was then to "inveigle the said Burch to rob his master." Unfortunately, the young Burch "being drunk" was unable to carry out his part in the plan and was carried into a bawdy house by John Rotchford, and soon afterward the apprentice as well as his

122 Stow, 370.
123 Latimer, 114. See also Archer, 211-12.
partners in crime wound up in front of the sessions court. Such stories are confirmed
by Paul Griffiths’s conclusion that despite popular perceptions to the contrary, men far
more than women were involved in the petty crimes that took place in and about the
brothels.

Despite these somewhat lurid accounts, it is difficult to know exactly what these
brothels were like and how they conducted business. Some historians have begun to
estimate their approximate size and the types of clientele they serviced. Ian Archer has
found that typical brothels housed up to nine prostitutes and that each girl might pay a
rent of between 4s and 6s per week. But it is not clear how fees were determined or to
whom they were paid. In some cases, the client might negotiate with the prostitute
herself, who might then turn over a portion of her fee to the keeper, while in other cases
clients haggled with the bawd herself over the price of a particular whore. In
addition, whores might be traded between brothels. If a particular house was having a
busy night or if the clients wished to partake of the services of a particular girl she
might be requested from another house and delivered there by a pimp.

It is unlikely that prostitutes remained in one place for very long. In 1617,:
Margaret Atkinson described to the Bridewell court her experience in prostitution, and
the variety of locations in which she traded sex for money.

"Being demanded who had first the use of her body, saith one Thomas Strackey,
 a gentleman, had several times at his chamber at one Wilcock's a shoemaker in

125 Le Hardy, Vol. 1., 185.
126 Le Hady, Vol. 2., 118.
127 Griffiths, 51.
128 Archer, 213. Griffiths, 47.
129 Griffiths, 46-8.
Fleet Lane the use of her body, and afterwards a stranger at Lambeth Marsh at one Goodwife Clarton’s house who gave her 12s in silver. And she further saith. That about February last past one Garrett a clock-maker had the use of her body at the Seven Stars a victualling house at London Wall, and he gave her 52s, and about a fortnight after he had the use of her body there again, and lay all night with her and had there several times that night afterward the use of her body.”

Tales such as Margaret’s lend credence to the idea that prostitution was very much a mobile enterprise, which might take place in a stationary brothel or a variety of clandestine locations. Margaret’s story is typical of young women who came to London in search of positions in legitimate service, who might be seduced, coerced or forced into prostitution. In this case, Margaret had served as a servant to an upholsterer, then as a maid to “Lady Wiseman a prisoner in the Fleet,” for a year, then to “Lady Skynner by Vinisten House in Southwark” for three quarters of a year, then to a man in Hosier Lane for a period of a quarter of a year. It is not clear at what point in this story Margaret became a prostitute. She may have turned to prostitution during intervals between service positions or simply to supplement her income. It is also unclear precisely how she was introduced to prostitution, whether she was coerced or forced, or if offers to trade sex for money were a routine aspect of domestic service to which she succumbed.

In addition to illicit sex and associations with crime, another element that led to the perception that brothels were bastions of disorder were bawdyhouse riots. Although there is no record of a brothel riot until the late sixteenth century, in the seventeenth century brothels were frequent targets of riots and tumults particularly around Shrove

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130 Bridewell Hospital Records, Guildhall Library, BCB 6 (microfilm), Sept. 1617.
131 Ibid.
Tuesday. Typically historians have explained the occurrence of apprentice riots on Shrove Tuesday, i.e. the day before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent, as a “safety-valve” in which young men burned off sexual energy in expectation of the traditional period of deprivation. On Shrove Tuesday 1617 the apprentices rioted and attacked the Drury Lane Playhouse, Finsbury Prison and pulled down several houses in Wapping. Allegedly, James I had several of the apprentices who had been captured executed “for examples sake,” so as to prevent future uprisings.

Shrove Tuesday riots continued to be a problem however. In 1631, nervous homeowners Felix Hunt, Robert Rogers and other inhabitants of Southwark’s Paris Garden petitioned the Privy Council to provide their houses with protection during the upcoming Shrove Tuesday. Evidently, Hunt and Rogers had recently “bought a lease of a house wherein Mrs. Holland dwelt, who was reputed to keep a house of obscenity.” Although Mrs. Holland had vacated the house more than a month before, the apprentices had made it known through “thousands of scrolls and papers cast abroad in the City” that they intended to demolish the house along with twenty others nearby. Mr. Hunt and Mr. Rogers requested that “trained bands” be sent, as they feared that the watch would not be able to prevent the apprentices from “demolish[ing] the said houses.” In this case it is not known what ensued, however eight years later the Lords of the Council sent a letter to the Lord Mayor of London “requiring, for the prevention

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133 Calendar of State Papers Domestic Series, of the Reign of James I, 442.
of riots and tumults by apprentices and others on Shrove Tuesday, that strong watches be set, and that 800 men of the Trained Bands be kept in readiness." 135 Clearly this was a threat that both the Lord Mayor and the Privy Council were forced to take seriously.

This type of tumult was also satirized in popular literature. In 1668, a series of broadsides were published which purported to be a petition from the whores who had recently had their homes torn down. The broadside suggests that the "pulling down our houses were pretences/ Onely to colour your more foul offences," i.e. misrule and theft of "Plate and Linnen." 136 The apprentices' answer was published in response and finally the citizens reply which derided the apprentices "who by pretence of punishing of Whores Doe rob and steal from them their wealth and stores." 137 Although this particular broadside implies the riots were a relatively straightforward case of theft in the guise of youthful carousing, Tim Harris has seen the bawdy house riots of 1668 in the politico-religious context of a decision to re-impose laws against Protestant nonconformists. This explanation is specific to 1668 and does not explain the numerous riots recorded before that time. 138 More research will need to be done in order to understand the meaning behind this destructive apprentice ritual.

In 1587, William Harrison complained that the typical penalties imposed on "harlots and their mates," i.e. carting and ducking was considered by the offenders to be

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135 Analytical Index to the Series of Records Known as the Remembrancia Preserved Among the Archives of the City of London 1579-1664 (London: E.J. Francis & Co., Took's Court and Wine Office Court, E.C., 1878), 458.
136 The Whores Petition to the London Prentices (London, 1668)
137 The Citizens Reply to the Whores Petition and Prentices Answer (London, 1668)
138 Harris, 537-556.
“no punishment at all to speak of or but smally regarded,” suggesting that such punishment was not enough to deter resolute offenders.\textsuperscript{139} Harrison desired that adultery and fornication should “have some sharer law” and suggested that “the dragging of some of them over the Thames between Lambeth and Westminster at the tail of a boat is a punishment that most terrifieth them which are condemned thereto.” Unfortunately for Harrison, only the Knight Marshal could assign that particular sentence and only to those crimes which took place in his limited jurisdiction. Phillip Stubbes, the puritan polemicist also believed that whoredom was not taken seriously enough, wrote that “the punishment appointed for whoredom now is so light, that they esteeme not of it, thei seare it not, they make but a jest of it.”\textsuperscript{140} Stubbes advocated a punishment similar to that used on theives, branding with a hot iron on the “”cheeke, forehead, or some other part of the bodye that might be scene.”\textsuperscript{141} It is unlikely that this extreme punishment such as those suggested by Stubbes and Harrison were ever seriously considered. It is far more likely that Harrison’s and Stubbes’ remarks represent wishful thinking.

Punishments such as that witnessed by another citizen of London, Henry Machyn, were far more common. Machyn observed the punishment of two reputed whores in which the first woman lead a horse, on which her husband was backward mounted with “a papr on her h[ead, for] horwdom” and the second “[rod] in a care for


\textsuperscript{141} Stubbes, ibid.
horedume and bawdrie.”¹⁴² A similar punishment befell Elizabeth Morton who, in 1612 was found not guilty of committing a felony, but was nonetheless “whipped at a cart’s tail for a common whore.”¹⁴³ And in 1613 the sessions court found Roger Williams and his wife Margaret guilty of being “disturbers of the peace...and for keeping a common bawdy house” and sentenced them to be “carted in a cart from the gaol to their own house.”¹⁴⁴ This type of public shaming was far more common than the severe measures advocated by William Harrison and Phillip Stubbes. Yet Harrison’s and Stubbes’ complaint demonstrates the helplessness which some members of the community felt in preventing or controlling illicit sexual behavior.

Although individuals like Hugh Latimer and William Harrison might have hoped to prevent “harlots and their mates” from continuing to ply their trade, it is known that persons on almost every rung of the social ladder participated in prostitution and could be accused of bawdry. In 1614 James Jackson, a yeoman, was “vehemently suspected to keep a bawdy-house.”¹⁴⁵ Thomas Marcroft, whom was suspected of running a bawdy house with his wife, was a butcher by profession.¹⁴⁶ Alehouse keepers were also commonly accused of bawdry, as was Robert Davis in 1615.¹⁴⁷ Although most who were accused of bawdry were apprentices or artisans, gentlemen were not immune from prosecution, as in 1613 when John Kempe, “gentleman” was suspected of

¹⁴³ Le Hardy, Vol. 1, 4.
¹⁴⁴ Le Hardy, Vol. 1, 162
¹⁴⁵ Le Hardy, Vol. 2, 47.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 170.
“evil [life] and conversation” and in 1615 when Christopher Thwaites, “gentleman” was charged with keeping a bawdy house. In 1635, Thomas Cranley composed a pamphlet in which he described a young prostitute whom he observed being visited by “divers Gentlemen, and men of great fashion and worth.” It is likely that the widespread but clandestine purveyance and patronage of prostitutes likely led to the trade’s continued existence and ambiguous position in society.

Sexual immorality and commonness characterized prostitution in the early modern period, much as it had during the Middle Ages. By the mid-sixteenth century municipal brothels had been prohibited, yet they had not disappeared, and some critics believed their numbers to have grown. Bawdyhouses were loosely defined as any house of sexual immorality, not necessarily as a house used exclusively for prostitute and client rendezvous. As in the late Middle Ages, bawds might be either male or female, but were most frequently characterized as female. Likewise, prostitutes might be married or unmarried, but were most commonly young single women. Unlike in the middle ages however, the chief danger associated with prostitution was no longer excessive feminine lust and venery, but venereal disease. The principle difference between Ruth Karras’ Medieval model of London prostitution the early modern model as presented in this chapter is the arrival of syphilis and its association with prostitution.

It is venereal disease, and in particular syphilis that may have had the most influence on the public perception of prostitution and the threat it was believed to pose to society. I suggest that there emerged in contemporary public discourse a metaphor of

disease to describe prostitution that was a result of the appearance of syphilis in England. Although prostitution had been connected with illness in earlier periods, as Ruth Karras has pointed out, its primary association was with the sins of lust and venery. In the sixteenth century, the emphasis in discourses about prostitution became less about its sinful aspects and more about the physical dangers it posed to men. It is here that the contradictions and ethical dilemmas created by prostitution collided with its physical and economic liabilities.

CHAPTER 3

ATTITUDES TOWARD PROSTITUTION

During the sixteenth century England underwent a series of reformations and counter-reformations which seem to have had only a limited impact on the actual practice of urban prostitution. However the reformations, in addition to syphilis, strongly influenced attitudes toward prostitution, some of which are revealed in contemporary popular literature. As Ruth Karras argues, Medieval representations of prostitutes were concerned with excessive feminine lust and venery, while disease was rarely mentioned. During the early modern period, representations of prostitution underwent a significant evolution, such that by the end of the seventeenth century the prostitute was not only condemned for a whore, but feared as a predator.

Neither Catholicism nor Protestantism explicitly condoned prostitution, but in some ways medieval Catholicism had been more accepting of its existence. As discussed in Chapter 2, although the Catholic Church officially condemned intercourse for any purpose other than procreation, it accepted prostitution in practice. The logic behind this apparent inconsistency was that if a small number of women were not sacrificed as prostitutes, then lust would contaminate all of society. In this way, the
majority of women avoided seduction, adultery or rape, while men had an outlet for their sexual desires.\textsuperscript{150} So although the Catholic Church viewed prostitution with repugnance, it also tolerated its existence in order to maintain social and sexual order.

Unlike the Catholic Church, the Church of England saw marriage as the best defense against wayward sexual impulses. Marriage was promoted as a tool by which “good conscience might bee preserved on both parties, in brideling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh.”\textsuperscript{151} Any and all intercourse outside of the bonds of matrimony was considered “whoredom and uncleanesse,” worthy of “grievous punishment.”\textsuperscript{152} In this context, prostitution could not be justified as a necessary evil, because any sexual behavior outside of marriage was unacceptable. Although this was the official doctrine put forth by the Church, it is clear from the evidence given in the last chapter that they had some difficulty enforcing this philosophy on average Londoners. Further evidence that the church faced some difficulty enforcing chastity outside marriage comes from the homilies that were to be read in church every Sunday. One homily charges that among “many” fornication was “counted as no sinne at all, but rather a pastime, a dalliance, and but a touch of youth: not rebuked, but winked at: not punished but laughed at.”\textsuperscript{153} This provides some indication that perhaps the average Londoner felt less strongly about extra-marital sex than did the Church of England. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{150} Bullough, 66-7.
\textsuperscript{151} Mary Ellen Rickey and Thomas B. Stroup, eds. Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-1571) (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints. 1968), 239.
\textsuperscript{152} Rickey and Stroup, 239.
\textsuperscript{153} Rickey and Stroup, 78.
although Protestant theology left no room for prostitution, it was less problematic for society at large.

Another contrast between medieval Catholic and early modern attitudes toward prostitution lies in their differing beliefs concerning a prostitute’s ability to achieve salvation. Under Catholicism, a prostitute who confessed and repented her sins might receive forgiveness and achieve salvation. The famed humanist Desiderius Erasmus suggested that repentant prostitutes might “take an husband,” or commit themselves to a “godly Colledge or Monestery which receyveth those that have done amisse.”¹⁵⁴ A fact illustrated by the abundance of harlot saints venerated by the church including, St. Mary the Harlot, St. Afra, St. Pelagia, St. Thais, St. Theodora and most famously Mary Magdalene.¹⁵⁵ While each of these women were courtesans at one time or another, each repented and was redeemed. Such women provided a positive example, demonstrating that a whore who repents can achieve salvation. The Church of England rejected the veneration of saints however, which effectively removed positive role models and images of reformed prostitutes. One late seventeenth century pamphlet actually satirized the idea of a repentant prostitute. Thais, the heroine of the Crafty Whore, pretends reformation and devotion to a monastery after having read the story of Mary Magdalene. In actuality she uses her false conversion to increase the ardor of her lover and convince him she would make a “very virtuous wife.” Her ruse was successful and her suitor requests her hand in marriage, Thais quickly consents having become

¹⁵⁴ Desiderius Erasmus, Tudor Translations of the Colloquies of Erasmus, Dickie A. Spurgeon, ed. (Delmar: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972), 355.
“extreme weary” of life in the monastery.\textsuperscript{156} The pamphlet likely satirized the inmates of Magdalene houses, religious houses set up for repentant prostitutes in France, Italy and Spain.\textsuperscript{157}

Protestant theology further condemned prostitutes by denying them the sacrament of confession and forgiveness. Only faith was necessary to achieve salvation, yet \textit{sola fides} was not interpreted as a license to sin. Rather, a person’s behavior was taken as an outward indication of right faith and grace, meaning that persons who committed “evill workes, or not good workes” were of “dead, divelish, counterfaite and feigned faith,” and therefore were damned.\textsuperscript{158} Protestant Bishops declared in their sermons that “no uncleane person dreame of dispensation in his sin, I know God never hath nor will grant any.”\textsuperscript{159} After the English Reformation, women who engaged in whoredom were by definition sinful, incapable of reform and had little hope of salvation.

During this period the prostitute became the archetype of the disorderly woman. In their sexuality, their speech, their public presence and their physical bodies, prostitutes represented the opposite of the ideal English woman. This archetype does not necessarily present an accurate picture of what women who engaged in prostitution looked, acted or sounded like, but it does demonstrate that over the course of this period, the figure of the prostitute came to represent the negative extreme of female behavior. Meaning that the appellation “whore” conjured up a host of meanings beyond

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{The Crafty Whore: Or, the mistery and iniquity of Bawdy Houses Laid Open} (London, 1670), 51-2.
\textsuperscript{157} Perry, 102-3; Trexler, 58-9; Rossiaud, 201-4.
\textsuperscript{158} Rickey and Stroup, 19.
simply sexual impropriety, but extending to moral, behavioral and bodily disorders. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the archetype of the disorderly prostitute became a stock figure in numerous pamphlets, plays and ballads, the exploration of which can help us to understand common attitudes toward prostitution and their potential impact on women.

According to behavioral manuals like William Gouges’ *Of Domesticall Duties*, ideal English women devoted themselves to the home and did not “journey abroad without their husbands consent,” if that were the case then whores were represented as being the extreme opposite of that ideal.¹⁶⁰ Published in 1567, Thomas Harmon’s taxonomic depiction of the Elizabethan underworld included numerous female criminals, and several types of harlots, whom he referred to as “bawdy baskets,” “doxies,” or “morts.” Harmon described these characters as traveling thieves who made their livings from “lewd lothsome lechery” being “commen and indifferent for any that wyll use her.”¹⁶¹ Far from being contained within the household, whores wandered abroad, unprotected and unrestrained.

Some authors depicted whores standing in front or leaning out of open windows. Thomas Cranley’s Amanda left her window open so that the narrator was able to observe her freely.¹⁶² Thais, the *Crafty Whore*, often stood at her window, sometimes even “feign[ing] a cough, and so spit[ing] out at the casement” in order to attract her

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lovers attentions.\textsuperscript{163} The play \textit{The Mock Tempest or Enchanted Castle} includes a scene in which Stephania, a bawd, orders her whores to “get up in the windows, you musty Queens, make water in their Eyes, and burn e’ m out, I’m sure y’ are hot enough.”\textsuperscript{164} According to Laura Gowing, broken windows symbolized bawdyhouses and some women might have their windows broken for them as a form of public shaming, while Gail Kern Paster has demonstrated the “potential shamefulness of the association of women and water.”\textsuperscript{165} In addition, I would suggest that the open windows symbolize physical and visual accessibility, as whores were by definition accessible to all men. Furthermore, the loosing of bodily fluids upon male aggressors is interesting because in addition to being shameful, in the latter example the whore’s urine is being used as a weapon, which suggests that it possesses a malignant quality perhaps associated with venereal disease.

Ideally, English women were supposed to speak with “meaknesse” and a “milde composition of her countenance.”\textsuperscript{166} Early modern authors depicted prostitutes as behaving indecently, making obscene gestures and casting lewd remarks at passing men. In the \textit{Wandering Whore}, the title character attracted clients by

“sit[ting] down at the dore, set one foot to the right, the other to the left, as far distant as i can spread my imperfect Limbs, and cry Lads; her’s a can of the best liquor

\textsuperscript{162} Cranley, 2-13.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{Crafty Whore}, 5-6. See also: \textit{The Whores Rhetorick}, 6.
\textsuperscript{164} T. Duffett, \textit{The Mock Tempest or the Enchanted Castle} (London, 1675), 3. For an additional example of a whore urinating in a man’s eyes see: \textit{The Wandering Whore} (London, 1666), 7.
\textsuperscript{166} Gouge, 284.
in the fair, claping my hand on my market-place, and saying, here's your Ware boys, which invitation with a wink, a smile and chuck under the chin."\(^{167}\)

This character displays a set of behaviors that mark her as being a disorderly woman and a prostitute. She does not request money, although she does suggest that her genitalia are a "market-place." In another example, an author might depict whores hurling insults and curses, such as when Beantoffer, Moustrappa and Drinkallup, the whores in the *Mock Tempest*, call their pimp a "huffing Son of a Whore," a "rotten Jack in a box," and a "foul mouth'd Nickumpoop."\(^{168}\) It's unlikely that such phrases were uttered meekly or with a "mild countenance." This is interesting, because as Laura Gowing found in her study of the language of insult in early modern England, 'honest' early modern women were particularly vulgar when trading public insults with their neighbors.\(^{169}\) It makes one wonder whether or not these characterizations were not satirizing loud-mouthed women as much as they were prostitutes. We can see from dramatizations like this that 'honest' women and whores were expected to display specific behaviors at the extreme end of a spectrum. Yet in reality, it is unlikely that actual women fit precisely into either of these extremes.

As has already been discussed in Chapter 2, by the mid-sixteenth century prostitutes were commonly considered a vector for disease. This belief was reflected in popular literature, so much so that by the end of the seventeenth century the diseased whore and physically decayed bawd were stock characters, whose exterior putrescence

\(^{167}\) Peter Aretine, *Strange Newes from Bartholomew-Fair, or, the Wandering-Whore Discovered* (London, 1661), 3.

\(^{168}\) Duffett, 3.

\(^{169}\) Gowing, 59-110.
was merely an outward sign of their inner depravity. In addition, we can see a change over time in that earlier works portrayed disease as a punishment for a sinful life, whereas by the end of the seventeenth century syphilis was as much an occupational hazard as a sign of divine providence.

During the sixteenth century venereal disease was sometimes seen as divine punishment for a sinful life. Johannes de Vigo lamented human weakness and propensity for sin despite the risk of infection in his medical treatise *The Most Excellent Workes of Churgyere*. Originally published in 1514, and published in English in 1543 de Vigo believed

That for the transgression of hys holy lawes, he wolde plague the people with sondrye, and grevousse diseases. Howbeit our blindenes hath been so great, that in the multitude of moste fylthie and shamefule botches, sores, and other pitieous maladies we have not perceaved, how horrible a thynge synne is, and how present vengeence the dyspisying, and neglecting of goddes dredfull commandmentes, bryngeth upon us, no not when we have be buryne with every carbuncles, nor when our fleshe hath been torn from the bones, eaten up with lothsome cankers, nor when we have ben myserably tormented, wyth the moste fylthie, pestiferous, and abominable dysease the frenche or spanyshe pockes.\(^{170}\)

Playwrights also hinted at the providential nature of syphilis in their theatrical offerings. In the 1560 Tudor Interlude, *Nice Wanton*, Dalila, the wayward and lustful sister returns home suffering from an advanced case of syphilis.

"Full of pain and sorrow, crooked and lame,
Stuff’d with diseases, in this world forlorn!
My sinews be shrunken, my flesh eaten with pox,
My bones full of ache and great pain;
My head is bald that bare yellow lockes;
Crooked I creep to the earth again,\(^{170}\)

Mine eyesight is dim; my hands tremble and shake;
My stomach abhorreth all kind of meate.
For lack of clothes great cold I take,
When appetite serveth I can get no meat
Where I was fair and amiable of face,
Now am I foul and horrible to see;
All this I have deserved for lack of grace,
Justly for my sins God doth plague me. 171

Dalila, who abandoned her family to pursue a life of whoredom and indiscretion, is
clearly experiencing the full range of symptoms attributed to syphilis, including aching
joints, hair loss, and disfigurement. In this passage the author declares explicitly that
Dalila’s putrid physical condition should be seen as retribution for her wickedness. In
1596 William Clowes suggested that syphilis was “a notable testimonie of the just
wrath of God against that sinne.” 172 The physician noted that at the Hospital of Saint
Bartholomew in London, he had treated over one thousand “wicked and sinful”
syphilitics, whom he believed might otherwise infect “many good and honest
persons.” 173 Clowes’ belief that those persons currently infected were wicked, while
healthy persons were ‘good and honest’ provide some indication of the deleterious
impact venereal disease might have on the sufferer’s reputation. As pointed out in
chapter 2, syphilitics frequently bore visible signs of the disease on their skin, face and
head including soft-tissue damage and hair loss. Extensive damage of this nature would
be particularly difficult to conceal and may have had significant consequences for the
sufferer’s life and livelihood. Further archival research will be necessary to fully

172 Clowes, 147.
173 Clowes, 150.
understand the physical and emotional impact of venereal disease in the early modern world.

In the seventeenth century authors continued to describe in graphic detail the diseased bodies of prostitutes, however the notion of divine punishment began to drop away and disease became merely an occupational hazard. In a 1635 poem dedicated to whoredom, John Taylor "the Water Poet" described a prostitute who "stinkes like carrion, with her pox and paint." In addition, Taylor played with the phraseology "burnt by a whore" which was typically used to indicate the contraction of venereal disease from a prostitute, writing that "whores are over-stew'd, or roasted rotten." Taylor's contemporary, Thomas Cranley suggested that courtesans kept a physician on retainer to minister to her "polluted corps," and keep her a "sound and wholesome queane." The unknown author of a satirical treatise compared the whore's body to an "intire Scabbe; a great proportional Boyle." Such phrases describe the whore's body generally and certainly assume that all whores are diseased, but more illuminating are those authors who paid careful attention to their depiction of the prostitute's breasts.

The author of the Wandering Whore, a series of bawdy pamphlets, described a prostitute's naked breast as "ranckled, rotted and corrupted." The author of The
Whores Rheterick, a Restoration treatise, carefully enumerated the foulest aspects of the bawd’s body:

“an uninterrupted communication between her mouth and nose in the outside as well as within, heid by means of cerose humours that constantly distilled from one to the other; her breasts appeared like a pair of Bladders, without the least particle of Air within, and which had hung some Ages in the smoak of a Chimney; her Chin was acute and bending upwards, as if it longed to kiss the under Lip; it was graced with about a dozen hairs…” 179

It is notable that both of these authors, not only describe the bawd’s features in graphic terms, but also take care to describe the prostitutes breast as particularly corrupt and deformed. If the breasts are taken as symbolic of the idealized role of motherhood, than the diseased breast takes on additional meaning. Contemporary physicians believed that syphilis could be transmitted through breast milk and cautioned parents to beware of hiring an infected wet-nurse.180 The rotten breast was symbolic of women’s traditional role inverted and perverted in the body of the whore. If mothers formed part of the foundation of the body politic, whores helped to destroy community stability through their disorderly behavior and their diseased bodies.

Prostitutes may have been seen as rejecting women’s traditional social role by being unable or unwilling to conceive children. During the Middle Ages it was sometimes believed that prostitutes were incapable of conceiving because their wombs


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became clogged with semen from excessive sexual activity.\textsuperscript{181} Currently, women who were infected with syphilis have a high rate of miscarriage and only a 20\% chance of giving birth to a normal, healthy baby.\textsuperscript{182} It is likely that the health risks to an infected mother were even higher during the early modern period.

Even if a prostitute were not infertile as a result of disease or infection, she may have possessed some knowledge of contraceptive techniques. English authors noted how infrequently prostitutes seemed to bear children, some even argued that because prostitutes “seldom prove with Childe,” they were to be preferred over other women who were likely to become pregnant and require support.\textsuperscript{183} In his travel narrative, Thomas Coryat observed that Venetian courtesans had very few children because “according to the old proverb the best carpenters make the fewest chips.”\textsuperscript{184} Although “coitus interruptus” was not unknown, some prostitutes may have believed that post-coital urination as an effective means of avoiding pregnancy. Such a technique was illustrated in the bawdy pamphlet \textit{the Wandring Whore} in a dialogue between the bawd Magdalena and Julietta the whore. Magdalena inquires of Julietta whether or not she “piss presently after your work was over, to prevent his getting you with childe” to which Julietta replies “I settled on the Chamber-pot assoon as ever he was off, till I made it whurra....”\textsuperscript{185} Even if prostitutes did not actually make use of this practice, the

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\item \textsuperscript{181} Angus McLaren, \textit{A History of Contraception from Antiquity to the Present Day} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 118-9.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Marr, 288. For more on hereditary syphilis see: Quetel, 165-70.
\item \textsuperscript{183} Eugenius Theodidactus, \textit{The Ladies Champion Conflooring the Author of the Wandring Whore} (London, 1660), 9.
\item \textsuperscript{185} \textit{Wandring Whore}, 12.
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belief that they did contributed to the perception that such women were disorderly, unnatural and perhaps even possessing specialized knowledge which distinguished them from their more ‘virtuous’ sisters.

It is unlikely that forceful urination made a particularly effective contraceptive, and prostitutes may have turned to other methods to avoid bringing their child to term. The physician Andrew Boorde, included an entry on abortion in medical treatise, but chose not to go into specific detail lest “any lyght woman shulde have knowledge, by the whiche wylfull Abhorsion shulde happen.” Despite such precautions, certain herbs such as ræ, savin, triacle mustarde, thyme and brionye were known to be abortifacients and it was not unheard of for a woman to be presented to the sessions for participating in an abortion, such as in 1615 when Phylida Hodges was “charged to have [given] Margaret Chapman a drinke to have killed hir childe within hir.” It is debatable how widespread access to contraception and abortion was, if knowledge of such techniques was limited to the elite, or if it was present in folk medicine. It would be interesting to learn if there were female networks to which women might resort in order to receive abortifacients or contraceptive advice, but at this time further research is required.

In some ways the possibility that prostitutes might actually bear children was a greater concern than those who couldn’t. According to the Poor Laws of 1576 and 1598, illegitimate children whose parents were unable or unwilling to support them

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186 Boorde, Fol. ix, C.
became the responsibility of the parish of their birth.\textsuperscript{188} Such children and their mothers would likely have been an unwelcome burden on the parish. Bishop Richard Cooke argued that a bastard child "cannot inherit, if hee hath any right to inherit anything, it is nothing but the fruite of his fathers filthinesse, shame and disgrace. Illegitimate children were a source of shame in addition to a financial liability. Concerns about the economic burden were accompanied by the fear that multiple family members might have intercourse with a prostitute and that a child might result. John Taylor effectively illustrated this ethical dilemma:

And in those stewes, where women are so common,  
In entertaining all, refusing no man,  
Whereas a father with a Whore may lye,  
Which done, his sonne his place may hap supply,  
And then and Unkle, or a Brother may  
Succeed each other in that damned play:  
For no propinuity, or no degree  
Of Kin, that hant there, that can sweare th'are free  
From this commixion: and, which is worst,  
A Whore may have a bastard, borne and nurst,  
And growne a woman, and to this trade set her,  
May be a whore to him that did beget her;  
Or to her brothers, or to all her kin,  
Shee may be prostituted in this sin.\textsuperscript{189}

The possibility that a whore might have intercourse with multiple members of the same family and then might bear a child from those unions made the prostitute a particularly loathsome creature. Naturally, the males caught in this situation were relieved of responsibility for their sexual indiscretion and instead seen as victims of the prostitutes'.

\textsuperscript{189} Taylor, 110.
commonness. Of course most women were not professional prostitutes, but recall that the appellation ‘whore’ might be applied to any woman who engaged in extra-marital intercourse. In a sense the whore became an anti-mother; whereby instead of preserving the family through reproduction, she was seen as a force for destabilization and destruction.

Prostitutes threatened order and stability in several different ways, primarily through their interactions with men. Yet, in the Middle Ages one of the ways prostitutes were believed to threaten order was through the corruption of women, who might be tempted by the prostitute’s lifestyle, clothing or ornaments and be seduced away from a virtuous life. In the early modern period, prostitution was less seen as a danger to ‘honest’ women and more as a danger to the men who patronized prostitutes. By the end of the seventeenth century prostitutes were regularly characterized as vicious, deceitful predators with the potential to consume men’s reputations, fortunes, bodies and even weaken or destroy the Commonwealth of England.

One of the most interesting pamphlets written about the dangers of brothels, prostitutes and loose living in general is the *Mirour for Magestrates of Cyties*, written by George Whetstone in 1584. Dedicated to the “yong Gentlemen, of the Innes of Court,” Whetstones purpose seems to have been to warn young, elite men about the dangers of gambling, drinking and lechery. He argues that illicit forms of entertainment were having a negative impact on the economic and social health of London’s youth, writing that “The Marow & Strength of this happy Realme, I mean the Abilitie of the Gentlemen, is much weakned and, almost wasted, by haunting of these ungratious
Houses.” According to the author, the core of the realm was its citizenry and the strength of the state rested on the health of that citizenry, therefore their degradation in the dicing houses and brothels would necessarily undermine the vitality of the state.

Whetstone argues that “Man is called, Microcosmos, or a little world,” the king being the head, prelates the heart, magistrates and counselors the body, and so on.190 According to Whetstone, just as men are corrupted by lechery, so the “common’wealth, thus confused, would soone be confounded, for lacke of good Order.”191 Throughout his treatise Whetstone utilizes pathological language, creating a metaphor of disease that illustrates the effects of vice on the body politic. Whetstone compared whoredom and drunkenness to “daungereous infyrmitie in a Commonwealth” which “must be cured as the skillfull surgion doth a festered sore.”192 In the patrons of brothels, taverns and gambling halls, “infections grew by the fylthie conversation with ruffens, Bawdes, and such brave baggage” until finally “Dice, Drunkenesse and harlots, had consumed the wealth of a great number of ancient Gentlemen.”193 Ultimately Whetstone suggested that the remedy to these ills lay in rigid enforcement of existing legislation, writing that even the “severest Lawes, are not other, then written threatninges, without Execution.”194 It is interesting that so many of the words used by Whetstone to

191 Whetstone, 8.
192 Ibid, 3.
193 Ibid., 5.
194 Ibid. It is likely that this topic was of particular interest to Whetstone, because he himself was the son of a London testament owner and a member of the gentry, but tells us he squandered his patrony on dicing houses, taverns and brothels. See also the Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 20 Leslie Stephens and Sir Sidney Lee, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 1360-1.
illustrate the effects of vice on the commonwealth are similar to those used by physicians in their discussions of venereal disease and its symptoms.\textsuperscript{195}

In a pamphlet entitled *The Contention Betweene Three Brethren* (1608), three sons compete to prove which one is the most wicked and vicious, with the loser to be deprived of their inheritance.\textsuperscript{196} The drunkard impugns his whore-mongering brother, arguing that if a whore-monger were to inherit his fathers wealth he would "sellieth and spendeth it away" in order to finance his dalliances with prostitutes. The drunkard suggests that it is "the propertie of these villainous harlots, to waste and ruinate all, soule, body and goods, and to be so catching and shameless snatchinge, that they never cease craving and taking."\textsuperscript{197} This pamphlet, like *A Mirour for Magistrates*, suggests that prostitution is the downfall of the state. It declares that numerous "cities, townes & kingdomes, have there ben brought to utter decay" through the toleration of whoredom.\textsuperscript{198} Unlike George Whetstone, the unknown author of this pamphlet does not make extensive use of pathological metaphor, however he does point out the debilitating physical effects of whoredom. The author indicates that meddling with prostitutes may bring "greevous woundes, and daily plagues: without exception of person, hee punisheth Whores and Whore-mongerers, as with scabbes, gowtes, pockes, baldnesse, and other like Lazarus diseases."\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{195} See: Von Hutten, 3; Borde, Fol. lxxxxvi; Clowes, 150-5.
\textsuperscript{197} *Contention*, 5.
\textsuperscript{198} *Contention*, 10.
\textsuperscript{199} *Contention*, 11.
Through the first half of the seventeenth century whores were condemned for the sinfulness, their commonness and their role in the spread of disease. These elements are present in Thomas Dekker’s play, the *Honest Whore*, in which the whore’s body is compared to

“the common-shore, that still receives All the town’s filth. The sin of many men is within you: and thus much I suppose, That if all your committers stood in rank, They’d make a lane, in which your shame might dwell, And with their spaces reach from hence to hell. Nay, shall I urge it more? There has been known as many by one harlot, maim’d and dismemb’red As would ha’stuff’d an hospital.”

In the above paragraph Dekker denounces prostitutes for their public sexuality, and likens them to receptacles of sin. He further alludes to their role in the spread of venereal disease before going to say that

“Whores will be rid to hell with golden bits. So that you’re crueller than Turkes, for they Sell Christians only, you sell yourselves away. Why, those that love you, hate you: and will term you Liquorish damnation; with themselves half sunk After the sin is laid out, and e’en curse Their fruitless riot; for one begets Another poisons; lust and murder hit: A tree being often shook, what fruit can knit?”

Here, Dekker equates prostitutes to vehicles that will transport men to hell, and further suggests that whores can not bear children due to excessive sexual activity. Sir Thomas Overbury and John Taylor used similar language in poems printed in 1614 and 1622 respectively. Specifically, Overbury described the whore as “a high-way to the Divell”

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201 Ibid.
and Taylor wrote, “Whores are the Hackneys which men ride to Hell.” It is important to note that in each of these passages the whore’s actions are largely passive. They are portrayed as receptacles or vehicles whose bodies are available to be purchased, ridden or used. In the first half of the seventeenth century prostitutes were viewed as carriers of disease, passively causing the downfall of themselves and their customers through sexual indiscretion, however by mid century prostitutes began to be portrayed as an active threat to the welfare of unsuspecting men.

A pamphlet entitled The Trap-Pannians Alias Trap-Pallians Alias Trap-Tonians published in 1653 claims to reveal “the cunning Courtezans of the Town” who are responsible for the “Disgrace, Impoverishment and utter ruin of many honest and eminent men in and about London.” Although the whores are still somewhat passive, their clients are no longer portrayed as active participants, rather they have become patsies, duped by artful whores. The title page of the Wandring Whore Discovered, promises to describe “the mad flights, merry-conceits tricks, whimsies, and quillets used by the Wandring-Whore, her Bawds, Mobs, Panders, Pads and Trulls for the drawing in of young Hectors.” Published in 1661, the whore in this pamphlet is portrayed as the agent of men’s destruction, and again the “hector” is merely an unsuspecting victim.

Originally published by the Italian author Pietro Aretino in the early sixteenth century, The Wandring Whore is a series of bawdy pamphlets published in English between 1660 and 1663 which contains fictional dialogues between a bawd, a whore, a

203 The Trap-Pannians Alias Trap-Pallians Alias Trap-Tonians (London, 1653), 1.
gallant, and a pimp. These pamphlets depict whores as conniving criminals who offer sex with painted smiles but whose machinations promise the undoing of heedless clients. The *Wandering Whore: Part II* contains a scenario in which the pimp gives the whores instructions to “paint, Powder, and perfume their clothes and carkasses, have fine clean Holland-smocks, kiss with their mouths open, put their tongues, as all wantons do, in his mouth, and suck it...” Then, as her mark is distracted by these attentions, the whore puts her “left hand in his Cod-piece, the right hand in his Pocket,” and proceeds to rob him at will. In this situation the prostitute is the aggressor, who conducts her business without the knowledge of her hapless suitor. Interestingly, the male pimp is in a supervisory position, directing the prostitutes actions and using her as vehicle to commit theft.

In the third part of the *Wandering Whore* an unwary client loses more than his purse as he is attacked by a prostitute acting under her own command. In this story, a “gentleman” becomes “much distemper’d in drink” and is lured into an alley by a prostitute. After causing the man to become aroused, the harlot “drew out a sharpned knife for that purpose, and holding of his P_____ close by the root, she cut it cleer and sheer off.” In this situation, gender roles appear to have been reversed. The man is hapless and distracted, his faculties clouded by drink, while the prostitute is cool and calculating. The man is passive and allows himself to be lead, while the prostitute is

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204 *Aretine*, 1.
207 Ibid.
aggressive and directs their encounter. Finally the prostitute, possessing a phallic instrument, castrates the man and leaves him bloody and mortally wounded.\textsuperscript{209} Thus, the prostitute 'un-mans' her victim and takes on the masculine gender role.

Although the \textit{Wandering Whore} is a particularly gruesome example, it is not alone in its representation of prostitutes as conniving and potentially vicious predators. Instead, most late seventeenth century pamphlets identify disease, deceit and avarice as the harlot's weapons of choice. \textit{The Whore's Rhetorick}, published in 1683, depicts a dialogue between a bawd and her protégé. The old bawd, Madame Creswell, instructs Dorothea, her student, that she need only end her career when she has "ruined a million of unhappy clients, that have thrust their cause into your hands, and got a mass of money, by bawling, cheating and lying....When you have acquired a plentiful fortune, by destroying many legions of wretched patients; it will then be a good time to leave of killing."\textsuperscript{210} Again, the language used in this dialogue is pathological as clients are described as ailing patients. Here, the prostitute is depicted as an agent of male destruction, not a passive vehicle to damnation. In fact, there is little if any reference to sin or damnation within the text of the dialogue, the wasting of fortunes, reputations and bodies.

In the Middle Ages, representations of prostitutes condemned their uncontrolled lust and their venery, however even harlots could be redeemed if they confessed and

\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Wandering Whore: Part IV} (London, 1660), 6.
\textsuperscript{209} For further examples of gender reversal see: \textit{Haece-Vir: or The Womanish-Man: Being an Answer to the Late Booke intitled Hic-Mulier} (London, 1620); Shackerley Marmion, \textit{Holland's Leaguer} (London, 1632); \textit{The Crafty Whore: or the Mistery and iniquity of Bawdry Houses Laid Open} (London, 1670), 53; \textit{The Whores Rhetorick}, 25, 144; \textit{A Description of Wanton Women} (London, 1690).
resented their sins. Medieval women could look to Mary Magdalene and others harlot saints as the model by which prostitutes might achieve salvation. Under Protestantism, saints were no longer venerated and prostitutes had little hope of salvation. In the early modern period, prostitutes were represented as the archetype of the disorderly woman. Unlike in the Middle Ages whores were more than simply venal and lustful, they betrayed a range of ethical, behavioral and physical disorders. The whore’s lack of modesty, her public availability, her unnatural reproduction and her diseased body all made the prostitute the archetype of the unnatural woman. In addition, by the end of the seventeenth century, prostitutes began to be represented as an aggressive and cunning predator, actively pursuing the destruction of hapless men.

Of course, this does not mean that the behavior of actual prostitutes changed over time, or that they actually sought to consume their clients. However changes in the ways prostitutes were perceived is likely a result of the influence of venereal disease. In the Middle Ages, prostitutes were despised for lust and venery, which might cause a man to sin, but were otherwise relatively harmless. Yet by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, prostitutes were well known vectors for disease. When 200 years earlier, a tumble with a harlot might have meant penance and possibly even public disgrace, in the Tudor and Stuart period, the same tumble could mean a lifetime of pain and suffering.

210 The Whores Rhetorick, 33.
CONCLUSION

The history of prostitution in London is largely one of continuity rather than change, however there were some significant developments in the sixteenth century that altered the way prostitution was understood in the early modern period. In the Middle Ages, prostitution was regulated by the state and geographically associated with Southwark. Prostitutes were reviled for their lust and venery but were also considered a necessary evil that the church tolerated but did not condone. In addition, Medieval representations of prostitutes included harlot saints like St. Pelagia, St. Thais and Mary Magdalene, demonstrating that a prostitute could reform, achieve salvation and potentially even sainthood.

In the sixteenth century there occurred three developments in the history of London prostitution. The first was the introduction of syphilis to England, probably in the first half of the century, although the specific date is unknown. Syphilis was a painful, humiliating and deadly consequence of illicit sex for which the cure was often as debilitating as the disease itself. From the very beginning, syphilis was associated with prostitutes, however unlike their continental counterparts English authorities made little or no effort to monitor prostitute’s health or prevent the spread of the infection.
Second, in 1546 Henry VIII issued a proclamation that suppressed the public stewes of Southwark. Nothing in the document suggests that it was a response to an attempt to control syphilis, nonetheless the timing of the proclamation is notable in that it followed so closely on the heals of the disease. While the proclamation ostensibly aimed to end prostitution in the capital, it was directed only at the public stewes, private brothels continued to operate with relative impunity. Those prostitutes and brothel keepers who were penalized may have been too blatant, too rowdy, or too disorderly and were punished as a result. Still, prostitution continued to operate much as it had in the Middle Ages, simply lacking the regulation it had once possessed.

Third, during the sixteenth century England underwent a series of religious reformations and counter reformations that left the nation with an uneasy Protestant settlement. Unlike the Catholics, Protestants did not consider prostitution to be a necessary evil. All sex outside of marriage was considered unclean and sinful, and an indication of wrong faith and a lack of grace. In addition, the Protestant church no longer supported the veneration of saints, meaning that there were no longer any positive representations of reformed harlots. Magdalene houses and hospitals for repentant prostitutes were no longer a possibility for women who may have wanted to leave the trade.

I contend that while the actual practice of prostitution probably changed very little between the later medieval and the early modern period, attitudes toward prostitutes did undergo a significant change. According to Ruth Karras, in the Middle Ages prostitutes were reviled for their lust and venery, but representations of whores
were not monolithically negative. In the early modern period, prostitutes were
condemned as the archetype of the disorderly women, lustful and venal to be sure, but
also loud, vulgar, infertile and diseased. By the end of the seventeenth century,
representations of prostitutes became even more negative, eventually depicting them as
deceptive and aggressive predators who not only sought to seduce their clients but to
destroy them. It is likely that the representation of prostitute as predator is a result of
the close association between prostitutes and venereal disease. In the Middle Ages,
meddling with a harlot might bring a man disgrace, but in the early modern period it
could bring pain, humiliation, poverty and death.

Although the subject of prostitution and venereal disease has received some
attention from historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, few early modern
English historians have explored this issue. Further research on sixteenth and
seventeenth century prostitution, hospitals and health care is required in order to
understand fully the impact of this disease in the early modern world.

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211 See: Judith R. Walkowitz: *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the
Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990); Mary Spongeberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The
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