

“POLISHING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: COURTESANS AND FEMALE VIRTUE IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH PRINT CULTURE”

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“POLISHING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: COURTESANS AND FEMALE VIRTUE IN
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DEDICATION

For my parents, Carol and Lynn Merritt,
whose emotional and financial support made this possible,

And

For my grandfather, Walter Kalteyer,
whose passion for history first inspired me.

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CHAPTER I:

GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND PRINT CULTURE:

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Throughout the latter decades of the eighteenth century, popular print culture was a central arena for the negotiation of competing societal discourses. As the cultural narratives of elite libertine enlightenment and middle-class propriety vied for cultural dominance, their respective constructions of women, of acceptable femininity, and of female sexuality became a point of significant contention.¹ This project will trace the changing dynamics of that struggle for cultural hegemony through the changing depiction of elite courtesans and female sexuality in popular print culture.

Historians generally date the beginning of the rise of libertine culture in England to the Restoration and the reign of Charles II.² Lawrence Stone notes a “phase of permissiveness, even license, beginning in 1670,” and suggests that this societal

¹ For convenience, I am using the term ‘middle-class,’ though that term was not used with any consistency or regularity until the nineteenth century. By middle-class, I refer to the 18th century notion of the ‘middling sort’ that existed between the aristocracy and the working class. For an in-depth discussion of the eighteenth-century social landscape, please see Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, especially pages 23-24, 61.

² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 328.; Kevin Sharpe, “‘Thy Longing Country's Darling and Desire’: Aesthetics, Sex, and Politics in the England of Charles II,” in *Politics, Transgression, and Representation at the Court of Charles II* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art; London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007), xiv.

evolution was a reaction to the “collapse of moral Puritanism.”³ Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell contend that sexual libertinism is simply one part of a broader embrace of Enlightenment ideals. The challenge to the traditional boundaries of sexual and moral behavior implicit in libertine sexual license was part of a larger Enlightenment narrative that sought to challenge conventional thinking about society, culture, and politics as well.⁴ Kevin Sharpe argues that the “new, unabashed sexuality that, from the beginning, characterized Charles’s court” challenged traditional mores and set a new standard for Court conduct. With Charles’s openness about his own sexual misconduct setting the example, sexual promiscuity became a hallmark of fashion at Court and in high political circles.⁵ Over time, this loosening of conventional ideas about sexuality and gender would move beyond the Court and into the rural elite and public sphere, driving the evolution of libertine culture.⁶

Stone contends that the “phase of permissiveness” lasted until roughly 1810, but resistance to libertine ideas began decades earlier. The libertine discourse, while broadly embraced throughout English society, was never without critics. The highest levels of the elite always embraced libertine license far more enthusiastically than lower levels of society.⁷ As the middle class slowly accumulated social and political power across the eighteenth century, their challenge to libertine values would also gain in strength, ultimately forcing them, if not completely out, at least behind closed doors.

³ Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 339.

⁴ P. M. Cryle and Lisa O’Connell, *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty, and License in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 2.

⁵ Sharpe, “Thy Longing Country’s Darling,” 17.

⁶ Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 328-9.

⁷ Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 328.

Courtesans and Society

Courtesans have always inhabited a unique position in society. They are not prostitutes, though they do exchange sex for money. Nor are they traditional mistresses, who reserve their favors for a single protector. While they may place themselves under the protection of one man for a time, they are very much understood to be their own mistresses, so to speak. They exist in a half-world of society, the *demi-monde*, where they are lauded and adored and besieged by the men of the polite world, but resolutely ignored by the women. The term courtesan, often used interchangeably with *demi mondaine* or *demi-rep*, implies a degree of refinement not expected from lower-level prostitutes. This refinement, often supplied by an early lover or an ambitious brothel-owner, combined with the ability to make choices, was what separated the elite from lesser courtesans. A large part of an elite courtesan's allure was that she did have the luxury of choice. A carefully cultivated image of being both prohibitively expensive and extremely selective bestowed a degree of stature on her escort, simply by having been chosen. The allure of the highest-level courtesans lay not necessarily in her personal appeal, but in the fact that being in her company proved a man could afford her.

Academic studies of the eighteenth century and women's place in it have largely overlooked the role of the courtesan. Concerns about lower-level prostitution dominated efforts by social and evangelical reformers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and efforts to combat it and to reform individual prostitutes have been studied extensively.⁸ Similarly, considerable study has focused on actresses, emphasizing the

⁸ For a comprehensive examination of efforts to reduce and reform street-level prostitution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Tony Henderson's *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London* (London; New York: Longman, 1999) and Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge (UK); New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

growing professionalism of the English theater across the eighteenth century and actresses' efforts to be accepted as professionals and to distance themselves from the stigma generally associated with female performers.⁹ Historians have also dedicated considerable study to political hostesses, as well as the growing recognition of women as both readers and as writers as a force in the rapidly expanding eighteenth-century publishing world.¹⁰ Courtesans, however, have been largely ignored, despite the fact that were central to both print and popular culture, to the worlds of art and theater, and to the world of libertine aristocracy that included the leading politicians of the day. Literary studies of the eighteenth century have occasionally included memoirs written by courtesans as part of a larger category generally referred to as the "scandalous memoirists," but this inclusion brings with it a separate set problems.¹¹ Studies of courtesan memoirs have tended to the extreme, either focusing on their role as courtesan to the exclusion of all else or attempting to divorce the woman from the scandal altogether. Over-focusing on the 'scandalous' nature of the memoirs marginalizes courtesans "by reducing them to their transgressions."¹² Alternatively, divorcing the woman from the scandal "dehistoricizes and decontextualizes" both the work and the

⁹ For a discussion of the growing autonomy and professionalism of actresses in the eighteenth century, see Robyn Asleson's Introduction to *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776-1812*, Edited by Robyn Asleson., 1-21. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003; Felicity Nussbaum's *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Elizabeth Eger's "Spectacle, Intellect, and Authority: The Actress in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, edited by Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes, 33-51. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

¹⁰ There is an enormous amount of research in this field, but Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Felicity Nussbaum's *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), and Claire Brock's *The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), offer a good starting place.

¹¹ Caroline Breashears, "Scandalous Categories: Classifying the Memoirs of Unconventional Women," *Philological Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 188-9.

¹² Breashears, "Scandalous Categories," 188.

woman.¹³ This limited study also highlights a significant hazard of the linguistic turn, recognizing only those courtesans who wrote memoirs, and silencing the many who appeared in mainstream newspapers, early tabloids, satirical prints, plays, and portraiture, but left no formal writing.

Reliance on written works has also privileged those women who produced work beyond their role as a courtesan. Courtesan and actress Sophia Baddeley was the most celebrated courtesan the 1760s. She was a featured player at all the renowned playhouses and had a passionately devoted following both on and off stage. She was also associated with the leading politicians of the day, and even participated to some degree in mainstream society. Following her death, her lifelong friend and companion, Elizabeth Steele, published Baddeley's *Memoirs* in a massive seven volume set. Twenty years later, Mary Robinson had a brief career as a minor actress, and a later, more significant career as a prominent writer and social commentator. In between these careers, however, was a celebrated courtesan, famous for her short-lived romance with the young Prince George and subsequent relationships with Charles James Fox, Lord North, and Banastre Tarleton, among others. Despite these similarities, Sophia Baddeley is virtually unknown, while Robinson has been the subject of extensive study—as a transgressive female figure, as an actress, as a writer, even as an early feminist.¹⁴

The relationship between elite courtesans and the growing popular print culture was complicated. Courtesans relied on press coverage to maintain status and

¹³ Claire Brock, "'Then Smile and Know Thyself Supremely Great': Mary Robinson and the 'Splendour of a Name,'" *Women's Writing* 9, no. 1 (2002): 107, accessed June 22, 2013, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rwow20/9/1#.UcZJmJzNIBU>.

¹⁴ For a sampling of the academic literature regarding Mary Robinson, please see Claire Brock, "'Then Smile and Know Thyself Supremely Great': Mary Robinson and the 'Splendour of a Name,'" *Women's Writing* 9, no. 1 (2002).; Anne K. Mellor, "Making an Exhibition of Herself: Mary 'Perdita' Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 22, no. 3 (2000).; Eleanor Rose Ty, *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

marketability. The popular press relied on coverage of celebrity courtesans to create a community of readers and to drive sales. While these agendas overlapped significantly, there were rifts. Newspapers, ‘biographers,’ and print engravers benefitted from increasingly intimate or salacious coverage of courtesans, who, in turn, sought to maintain a balance between accessibility and exclusivity. The popular press built elite courtesans into celebrities, creating and advancing constructed personas that, though often positive, nonetheless differed significantly from the personas the courtesans themselves wished to advance.

This struggle between the press and elite courtesans for control of their public images can be seen in mainstream newspapers, in the early tabloid or ‘libertine’ press, in memoirs and autobiographies, even in portraiture and visual print culture. Satirical prints often included famous courtesans as commentary on contemporary gossip, but also as a way to discuss larger issues. As elite courtesans generally chose their lovers from the social elite, social commentators often included them in commentary on leaders of Parliament, the royal family, and government administration.¹⁵ While courtesans may have had little if any control over their depiction in satirical prints, they could assert control over their depiction in paintings. The fact that we see multiple portraits of courtesans by established artists argues for a collaborative relationship between artist and subject.

Joshua Reynolds painted celebrated courtesan Kitty Fisher seven times.¹⁶ At the time, her celebrity far outstripped his in the popular sphere. If she were dissatisfied with his depiction of her, she would no doubt have sought another painter. As would Mary

¹⁵ Cindy McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press / Clarendon Press, 2004), 9-10.

¹⁶ Marcia Pointon, "The Lives of Kitty Fisher," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (2004):

Robinson, Nancy Parsons, Frances Abingdon, Nelly O'Brien, Sarah Siddons, and Elizabeth Billington. As Reynolds built his career, he was determined to raise the profile of English portraiture. Part of his strategy was to draw ever larger and more enthusiastic audiences to exhibitions by choosing subjects already known to the popular audiences.¹⁷ By establishing working partnerships with elite courtesans, Reynolds exploited the public fascination with scandalous women and in doing so cemented his own position as an urban celebrity.¹⁸ The courtesans also benefitted, however, by placing before the public a carefully mediated image they were able to control, demonstrating not only the role of courtesans in contemporary popular culture but also their active participation in shaping public perception.

Part of what makes courtesans so useful for tracing the changes in public constructions of femininity is the development of the 'celebrity courtesan' in the middle of the eighteenth century. The emergence of celebrity culture, and the rise and subsequent fall of the celebrity courtesan illustrate the dynamic nature of eighteenth-century popular culture and the competing discourses at play. The concept of celebrity evolved in the eighteenth century as a result of a growing urban population, an expanding popular press, and a new fascination with the notion of privacy. Historian John Brewer notes that the efforts of the civil public sphere to define itself as an authoritative entity also brought the parameters of the private or 'intimate' sphere into sharper focus, and simply defining the private as off-limits to the public gaze increased public interest.¹⁹ This fascination with

¹⁷ Mark Hallett, "Reynolds, Celebrity, and Exhibition Space," in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, ed. Martin Postle (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 35.

¹⁸ Martin Postle, "Painted Women: Reynolds and the Cult of the Courtesan," in *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776-1812*, ed. Robyn Asleson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 24.

¹⁹ John Brewer, "This, That, and the Other: Public, Social, and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Shifting the Boundaries: Transforming the Language of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 17.

the private sphere is reflected in an increasingly intrusive popular press and the birth of the celebrity. While fame and renown are based on accomplishment and imply a degree of deference or distance, celebrity is fueled by a sense of intimacy and immediacy. Celebrity requires more titillation than simply a public persona, and a more intimate connection than public adulation. In the eighteenth century, as the very concept of ‘celebrity’ was being constructed, celebrity status was driven by public access to private life.

The earliest ‘celebrity courtesans’ were actresses such as Kitty Fisher and Sophia Baddeley in the middle of the eighteenth century. Neither were particularly accomplished performers. They were, however, exceptionally talented at attracting wealthy lovers and connecting with the public. Both women were acutely aware of the importance of print culture to their success, and actively used it to enhance their popularity and shape a specific public persona. Though Baddeley and Fisher relied primarily on ‘visual’ print culture such as engravings and portraiture instead of newspapers, both also used the press when necessary. Kitty Fisher used newspapers to respond directly to her critics, publishing open letters in the press to take her case directly to the popular audience.²⁰ Sophia Baddeley used press coverage of public entertainment venues to provoke discussion, raise her profile, and garner public support.²¹ Interacting with the public sphere, for Fisher and Baddeley, primarily meant controlling the image being presented to the public. Their reliance on engravings and portraiture allowed them to control their physical image, while using the press to respond to critics.

²⁰ *Public Advertiser*, March 27, 1759. Burney Collection.

²¹ Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability, and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 95-6.

For the next generation of celebrity courtesans, women who rose to prominence in the 1780s such as Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Armistead, Gertrude de Mahon, and Grace Dalrymple Eliot, interacting with the popular public sphere was far more complicated. The expansion of the popular press and the growing ‘cult of celebrity’ meant ever-more intrusive press coverage that demanded constant attention. As Marsha Pointon demonstrates, there was considerable critique of Kitty Fisher in the public sphere. Numerous broadsheets and pamphlets linked her to military defeat, economic and political failure, and moral decay. These attacks, however, appeared as individual publications, not part of the daily press.²² For elite courtesans in the 1780s and 1790s, attacks were less vitriolic but more pervasive and combating them required more finesse. This was further complicated by the fact that later attacks on individual courtesans were often implicit attacks on the entire social construct of elite libertine license. Fisher and Baddeley’s popularity peaked before the cultural narrative of middle-class propriety began making real inroads in to elite libertine culture. Robinson *et al*, in contrast, had to not only combat negative press coverage, but also situate their public personas within a changing discourse of acceptable femininity.

The evolution of celebrity culture illustrates both the power and the susceptibility of popular opinion. Public fascination created the celebrity courtesan. The elite courtesan’s carefully curated image of beauty, extravagance, and distinction exploited the societal discourse of libertine sexual license and the growing public fascination with the private sphere, but it was the popular public sphere’s embrace of that image that made them into celebrities. Later in the century, as the public discourse shifted from libertine license to middle-class propriety, popular opinion turned against elite courtesans, grouping them

²² Pointon, "The Lives of Kitty Fisher," 84-87.

with lower-level prostitutes, rejecting their earlier celebrity, and demonstrating the fickle nature of public opinion.

The Emerging Cultural Hegemony of the Middle Class

What would develop into the modern understanding of the ‘middle class’ coalesced over the course of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries out of a loose aggregation of prosperous merchants and manufacturers, lesser gentry, and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and clergy. British historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argue that this diversity of experience was countered by “common material interests and fundamental values...[and] the commitment to an imperative moral code and the reworking of their domestic world into a proper setting for its practice.”²³ These groups were informed by rhetorical narratives of social reform and evangelicalism, and while these themes drew on different traditions and motivations, both sought to establish a new cultural hegemony based on a “coherent middle-class ethos” that emphasized domesticity, respectability, and moral vigilance.²⁴

While the elite libertine construction of acceptable femininity encompassed the presence of women in the public sphere, the growing middle class advocated an increasingly sharp division of social and cultural life along gender lines. This division was shaped—and to a large part driven—by the ideology of separate spheres. Developed by Enlightenment thinkers on the continent, this ideology presented a highly polarized vision of gender roles that emphasized the fundamental distinctions between men and

²³ Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 25.

²⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 10.

women and contributed to the development of a system of complimentary but fundamentally opposing characteristics and traits. Although the debate about the impact of separate spheres ideology on the actual lived lives of women continues, there was without question a sharpening of the rhetoric concerning women's place in society. This phenomenon resulted in a calcification of boundaries of acceptable femininity, as well as steadily increasing attempts to marginalize women from formal participation in the public sphere over the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁵

Davidoff and Hall argue that separate spheres ideology was central to the evolution of the 'middling sort' of eighteenth century into the middle class of nineteenth century.²⁶ Seeking to define themselves in contrast to both the aristocracy and the working class, the middling sort drew sharp distinctions between aristocratic license, working class ignorance and instability, and middle-class propriety, based largely on redrawn boundaries of gender and domesticity.²⁷ Informed by evangelicalism and Enlightenment writing, the nascent middle class embraced a 'cult of domesticity' that assigned new gendered meanings to public and private, work and home, commercial and domestic. As the worlds of work and home grew increasingly distinct, the ideals of domesticity and separate spheres combined to identify the home as the 'proper' sphere for women, where their innate softness and sensibility were best suited, just as men's natural aggression and rationality suited them for the 'public' sphere of work. As this newly cohesive middle class grew in economic and political influence, their values would

²⁵ For an in-depth discussion of the evolution of separate spheres, see Davidoff and Hall's *Family Fortunes*. For a discussion of the historiographical efficacy of separate spheres as an analytical tool, see Amanda Vickery's "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 2 (June 1993).

²⁶ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 324.

²⁷ Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 23.

penetrate further into society, and ultimately define societal ideas about female propriety.²⁸

New ideas and anxieties about the public world of work and the economy contributed significantly to the middle-class embrace of the cult of domesticity, however private it may seem. Evangelical commentators saw the growing market economy as dangerously amoral and argued “men could operate in that amoral world only if they could be rescued by women’s moral vigilance at home.”²⁹ Conduct books aimed at young women emphasized the importance of the role of “wife and mother...that magnet that draws man to the domestic altar, that makes him a civilized being, a social Christian.”³⁰ A wife’s primary role, therefore, was not sexual object, but moral anchor for men navigating the world of business. This moral superiority suited women to domesticity by rendering them *unsuited* for the harsh world of business and work. The most significant consequence of this transformation of “women’s image from sexual to moral being” was to recast women as first sexually passive, and ultimately as entirely asexual.³¹

This reconfiguration of female sexuality controverted Western tradition that as far back as Plato and Aristotle had conceived of women as sexually voracious, far more sexual, in fact, than men. Nicolas Venette’s *Conjugal Love, or, The Pleasures of the Marriage Bed*, published originally in 1687 and reprinted well into the nineteenth century, notes that “women are more lascivious than men,” and that “women will be about it a whole

²⁸ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 25.

²⁹ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 74.

³⁰ Nancy Armstrong, “The Rise of the Domestic Woman,” in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, *Essays in Literature and Society* (New York: Methuen & Co, 1987), 105.

³¹ Nancy F. Cott, “Passionlessness: An interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850,” *Signs* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1978): 226.

day...and not ready to go away after the business is over, as we are.”³² Similarly, John Marten’s *Gonosologium Novum*, originally published in 1709, notes that “with the woman it is almost endless...as soon as has done with one, she readily, and with great or greater pleasure, receives another, and so a third, and onwards,” and recounts stories of women wandering the streets to “solicit venary from whomever they meet with.”³³

Historian Thomas Lacquer argues that these popular myths of overpowering female sexuality began to lose power once female sexual pleasure was disconnected from conception.³⁴ Lacquer notes that as knowledge of anatomy advanced, moving from a ‘one-sex model’ to a ‘two-sex model,’ so did conceptions about human sexuality. The one-sex model assumed the female reproductive system to be an interior duplicate of the male reproductive system, making both male and female orgasms necessary for conception. The two-sex model, which developed following the discovery of clear anatomical differences, emphasized the disparate nature of male and female anatomy.³⁵ Since the sexes were now understood to be entirely distinct, female orgasm was no longer necessary for conception, thus rendering it largely unnecessary to men in general.

The impact of the switch to the two-sex model was largely cultural. The new understanding of females as biologically distinct contributed to the development of separate spheres ideology by demonstrating a biological, and therefore ‘natural,’ division between men and women. By applying the separate spheres notion of complementary traits and characteristics to human sexuality, passive female sexuality would serve as a

³² Nicolas Venette, *Conjugal Love, or, The Pleasures of the Marriage Bed* (London, 1707), 158, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

³³ John Marten, *Gonosologium Novum: Or, a New System of All the Secret Infirm and Diseases, Natural, Accidental, and Venereal in Men and Women...* (London, 1708), 86, 104. Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

³⁴ Thomas Walter Lacquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), viii.

³⁵ Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Walter Lacquer, eds. *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3-5.

natural balance to active male sexuality. Laquer argues, “Women’s bodies came to bear an enormous new weight of cultural meaning in the Enlightenment,” as anatomical differences were used to justify the reordering of gender roles.³⁶

These physical discoveries would underpin and inform cultural changes throughout the century and contribute to the changing rhetoric of women from sexually overpowering, to sexually passive, and ultimately to asexual. Jean Jacques Rousseau, incorporating popular understanding into his theory of complementary gender constructions, posited that women’s more dominant sexual nature required an inherent sexual modesty, otherwise “male desire would be either too weak to suit women’s desire, or too strong to suit men’s ability to perform.”³⁷ Sexual passivity and modesty were thus transformed into inherent female traits. Conduct books furthered the development of this construct commenting, “When a girl ceases to blush, she has lost the most powerful charm of beauty,” therefore emphasizing modesty as singularly important to feminine appeal.³⁸

To evangelical reformers, the emphasis on modesty as an element of female attractiveness implied a degree artificiality and emotional dishonesty that contradicted their vision of women as morally superior. They argued, instead, that it was women’s innate moral superiority, not design or strategy, that made them chaste and modest. In order to resolve the contradiction whereby modesty and virtue were seen as artifice and sexual allure, evangelical reformers adopted a new construction of femininity, which argued that proper women did not employ modesty as a sexual lure, because proper

³⁶ Gallagher and Lacquer, *Modern Body*, 18.

³⁷ Robert A Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 49.

³⁸ Vivien Jones, ed. *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, World and Word Series (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 46.; Cott, “Passionlessness,” 223-226.

women had no active sexual nature. In this discourse, for women to be sexually pure and emotionally honest at the same time, women must be sexually passive: not just passive, but “passionless.”³⁹

What began as sexual passivity in contrast to active male sexuality was transformed into sexual energy that could only be awakened within the safety of marriage, and then only with patience and delicacy. Significantly, this new discourse applied only to certain women. Members of the working class were generally assumed to be less evolved than the middle-class: less intellectual, more physical, and having fewer sensibilities to be offended. As a result, female sexuality became a class marker, much like the ideal of the non-working wife: a proper woman did not work, nor did she have an acknowledged sexual nature.

As the cultural hegemony of the middle-class developed, the boundary markers that determined respectability grew increasingly precise and sacrosanct and interacted to define, very specifically, the boundaries of a proper woman’s character, desires, activities, and goals. A proper woman did not impose herself on a business world in which she was ill equipped to function. A proper woman remained safely ensconced in the domestic sphere, caring for her family, educating her children, and maintaining the home. A proper woman did not acknowledge any active sexual desire, as that would label her improper at best, corrupt and abandoned at worst.

As the middle class grew in confidence and coherence, they increasingly sought to assert their cultural values into the public sphere. Recognizing the growing power of the press, the urban bourgeoisie used it both offensively and defensively to establish social and cultural influence to match their growing economic power. By using didactic periodicals

³⁹ Cott, “Passionlessness,” 224.

to redefine gentility and consumption, and the daily press to comment on existing social and political discourses, the middle-class discourse slowly displaced narratives of elite libertinism.

Commodity culture and consumer goods were central to the advance of bourgeois values into the public sphere. Conspicuous consumption had long been the sole purview of the elite, primarily because they were the only ones with the wherewithal to do so. As the middle class slowly gained cohesion, they defined themselves, at least in part, in opposition to aristocratic profligacy, enshrining restraint as a virtue and demonizing consumption as weak, effeminate, and unpatriotic. Whig politician James Burgh wrote, “A people enervated by luxury are but a nation of women and children.”⁴⁰ Numerous economists and politicians argued that consumption of luxury import goods would destroy the British economy, one going to so far as to call consumers of French luxury goods “petty traitors.”⁴¹ As consumer production came to dominate the English economy, and the middle class found themselves increasingly able to indulge in consumer goods, consumption was reconceptualized as virtuous—within certain parameters. Unrestrained consumption, overindulgence in ‘luxury,’ and consumption of foreign goods were still problematic, but proper consumption within the bounds of ‘good taste’ from British producers demonstrated gentility, virtue, and good sense.⁴²

By linking consumption to the construction of gentility, middle-class reformers exploited their economic power to advance their cultural agenda through popular print culture. Gentility had heretofore been a factor of birth and land ownership. As the

⁴⁰ James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions ; or, An Enquiry into Public Errors, Defects, and Abuses...* (London: Printed for E. and C. Dilly in the Poultry, 1774), 3: 59.

⁴¹ David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 109.

⁴² Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 19.

eighteenth century progressed, however, the middle class used popular print culture to redefine gentility as a cultural factor—a matter of presentation, of manners, and of taste. Written and published by the newly empowered middle class, early periodicals such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* shaped public discourse subtly through the “transmission of genteel codes of conduct,” but also by making clear links between consumer goods—the *right* consumer goods—and gentility.⁴³ Erin Mackie notes that fashion comprised far more than simply clothing. Fashionable choices also had to be made regarding “religious observance, speech and writing, manners, food, combat, sexual mores, employment, leisure pursuits, and human social types,” as being out of fashion increasingly implied a lack of gentility.⁴⁴

Conspicuous consumption was not only a marker for boundaries of gentility and class. It was also indelibly, and negatively, linked to constructions of gender. Separate spheres ideology cast women as passive, flighty, and driven by vanity and a love of novelty. Women’s passivity and vulnerability to vanity and luxury rendered them “ideally suited to consume,” driving anxiety that unrestrained consumption would lead to “moral corruption, as if the lust for a hat would provoke more dangerous desires.”⁴⁵ Early periodicals advanced this narrative, presenting portraits of female brains physically stuffed with lace and ribbons and of young women led astray by “every Embroidered coat that comes her way.”⁴⁶ Courtesans, notoriously conspicuous consumers, embodied societal fears about female consumption. Their blatant extravagance and the implicit

⁴³ Kathryn Shevelov, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

⁴⁴ Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 2.

⁴⁵ Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996)36, 28.

⁴⁶ Mackie, *Market à la Mode*, 116.

acknowledgement of men as the source of their income intensified anxieties about commodification, consumption, and wealth, and drove middle-class efforts to advance their “domestic propaganda,” that sought to return women to their ‘natural’ sphere and to masculine control.⁴⁷

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, commodity culture and early periodicals were the primary means of advancing the middle-class cultural discourse. By mid-century, these efforts had expanded from periodicals to the mainstream press. As daily papers and weekly magazines multiplied and were increasingly controlled by the bourgeoisie, they embraced bourgeois values and promulgated their construction of acceptable femininity.

Popular Print Culture and the Public Sphere

The growing division of life into discrete domains of public and private is central to any discussion of this period. Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the bourgeois public sphere, written in 1962 but not translated into English until 1989, is fundamental to this discussion.⁴⁸ Habermas posits a civic public sphere that developed out of the coffeehouse culture of the early-eighteenth century. In this public sphere, private individuals come together in public to debate state actions and policy, and to engage in “rational-critical literary debate.”⁴⁹ While ostensibly open to all, in practice Habermas’s public sphere was restricted by both gender and class, excluding women and members of the working class as incapable of reasoned debate. Habermas argues that over the course of the nineteenth

⁴⁷ Mackie, *Market à la Mode*, 119.

⁴⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1991).

⁴⁹ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 173.

century, the bourgeois public sphere broadened and democratized, transforming it from a “culture-debating” public to a “culture-consuming” public, and largely eliminating its power as a “legitimizing body.”⁵⁰

Habermas’s theory was groundbreaking, opening a new avenue through which to “conceptualize the relationship between social and ideological change.”⁵¹ The narrowness of his construction, however, allows for considerable challenge. The primary critique of Habermas’s theory argues that the public sphere was never a single unified entity, but rather an array of multiple publics existing in overlapping spheres. Gender historians argue that Habermas overlooks both women’s contribution to and women’s participation in the civil public sphere.⁵² Similarly, social historians argue that Habermas’s construction overlooks the contribution of the working-class public to civil discourse, as well as their participation in a wider popular culture informed by visual mediums and oral tradition.⁵³ Furthermore, the popular culture of consumption that Habermas identifies as the downfall of rational-critical debate did not suddenly manifest in the nineteenth century, but, rather, developed alongside Habermas’s rational-critical public sphere. Despite the criticism of its construction and constitution, the core of Habermas’s argument largely stands. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the development of an independent press combined with a steadily growing commodity culture and urban population to create a space for the public—of whatever constitution—to engage in discussion, formulate opinions, and pass judgment.

⁵⁰ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 159, 173.

⁵¹ Brian Cowan, “What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England,” *History Workshop Journal* 51 (Spring 2001), 129.

⁵² Brian Cowan, “What Was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in Post-Restoration England,” *History Workshop Journal* 51 (Spring 2001).; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁵³ Brewer, “This, That, and the Other,” 171.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, as England's urban population exploded, print culture played a significant role in the formation of urban communities. While Habermas addressed the central role of the press in the formation of his bourgeois public sphere, the narrowness of his class construction failed to recognize the formation of a wider urban community developing above any lesser boundaries of class, wealth, politics, or gender. The ever-growing percentage of the urban population receiving news, advertising, and social and political commentary from the press increasingly formed a single urban community. Despite this, historians of the British press have largely followed Habermas's lead, allowing specific class construction to limit research into eighteenth-century print culture.

Academic discussion of the 'popular press' almost universally refers to the nineteenth century, and the deliberate efforts of the press to cater to a popular—for which, read working-class—audience.⁵⁴ Social and cultural historians who have explored the role of the press in eighteenth-century England have focused almost exclusively on the early decades of the century. Elizabeth Eisenstein, among others, emphasizes on the “widening gulf” between elite and popular culture, pointing to the increasing reliance on print culture by the elite as a marker of the increasingly rigid boundaries between the elite and a popular culture that still relied heavily on the oral tradition.⁵⁵ This, however, assumes the impermeability of social and cultural boundaries, and ignores the interaction of oral tradition and print culture. Critics, echoing criticism of Habermas, argue that the boundaries between print culture and oral culture, and elite culture and popular culture, were far more permeable than this theory would suggest. Bob Harris argues that “the

⁵⁵ Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620-1800* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 65.

press helped to provide a common framework and vocabulary for public political debate,” but this overlooks the extent to which urban sensibilities, fashions, and cultural mores were also shaped by the press.⁵⁶ When calculating the extent of his impact on London society, Joseph Addison, the founder and publisher of the early-eighteenth century periodical *The Spectator*, estimated twenty readers per paper sold, demonstrating both a reading audience reaching far beyond circulation numbers—which are notoriously unreliable to begin with—and a contemporary awareness of the dissemination of print culture across class boundaries.⁵⁷ The widespread impact of the press, and its role in shaping popular sensibilities and opinions, demonstrate the limitations of both Habermas’s construction of the public sphere, as well as historians’ placement of the beginning of the popular press in the mid-nineteenth century.

Academic study of early-eighteenth century coffeehouse culture, also informed by Habermas, has explored the social and cultural contributions of early periodicals, especially *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Historians such as Erin Mackie and Shaun Maurer have used the study of periodicals to extend Habermas’s theories into discussions of gender, sexuality, and class, focusing specifically on the “didactic” role of the periodicals in shaping new ideas about civility and politeness.⁵⁸ These studies have largely ignored the growing daily and weekly press as a source of information, however, and there is very little corresponding work into the ‘didactic’ role of later periodicals.

Historian Cindy McCreery, whose work explores the role of satirical prints in the cultural landscape of eighteenth-century England, argues that “scholars’ insistence on

⁵⁶ Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 77.

⁵⁷ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, March 12, 1711.; Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, eds. *Press, Politics, and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 103.

⁵⁸ Mackie, *Market à la Mode*; Shaun L. Maurer, *Proposing Men: Dialectics of Gender and Class in the Eighteenth-Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

separating political from social satire” limits our understanding of the period by creating a “false ‘either-or’ classification” that belies the complicated role of print culture on eighteenth-century British society.⁵⁹ This tendency characterizes academic study of the British press and popular print culture as a whole. Most academic work on the British press in the eighteenth century has focused on its role in early-eighteenth century politics. Wider studies of the British press tend to skip from the role of individual papers as party organs in the early-eighteenth century to the brief existence of a radical press in the early-nineteenth-century to the “rise of ‘new journalism’” and the creation of the press baron in the mid-Victorian period.⁶⁰ The expansion of the daily press across the latter decades of the eighteenth-century, especially its role in the social and cultural transformations of the period, has been largely overlooked.

The print culture in mid-eighteenth century London encompassed satirical prints, mainstream newspapers, an underground and therefore unregulated press, and numerous periodicals. It also included what Lawrence Stone describes as “the large-scale production of home-made pornography,” that began with the circulation of “mildly obscene poems about court life” during the Restoration and grew precipitously in the last years of the seventeenth century.⁶¹ In contrast to the findings of historians of French print culture such as Robert Darnton and Sara Maza, this material did not have the political component seen in seventeenth and, especially, eighteenth-century pornography in

⁵⁹ Cindy McCreery, *The Satirical Gaze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press / Clarendon Press, 2004), 8.

⁶⁰ Mick Temple, *The British Press* (New York: Open University Press, 2008), 24, accessed June 1, 2013, <http://catalog.library.txstate.edu/record=b1769519~S1a>.

⁶¹ Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage*, 335.

France.⁶² Despite the fact that the Court was both subject and audience, the tone and the intent were clearly titillation, not politics.

Historian David Foxon argues that eighteenth-century England was an enthusiastic consumer of the libertine literature and libertine culture. Foxon demonstrates that every major work of pornography produced on the continent was quickly translated and published for English audiences.⁶³ Furthermore, erotica was not “fenced off from the rest of eighteenth-century culture,” but rather both reacted to and contributed to changes in society.⁶⁴ In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, print culture was part of a wider cultural landscape shaped by the societal discourse of libertine enlightenment, and as such, reflected the permissive atmosphere of the time. John Cleland’s infamous *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (popularly known as *Fanny Hill*), the “first original English prose pornography,” was published in 1748.⁶⁵ Reacting to changing societal discourses, printers introduced Magdalen narratives in the middle of the century. Building off of the new “seduction narrative” that placed ultimate blame for a young woman’s ‘fall’ on upper-class men who took advantage of properly-raised young women, this new narrative recast prostitutes as victims, allowing for the possibility of redemption but denying them agency.⁶⁶ Evangelical bourgeois reformers published Magdalen narratives as redemption stories that illustrated the importance of family and the efficacy

⁶² For further reading on the intersection of pornography and politics in French print culture, please see Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Horton, 1995).; Dena Goodman, *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen* (New York: Routledge, 2003).; Sarah C. Maza, “The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited: The Case of the Missing Queen,” in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1991).

⁶³ David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1690-1745* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1965), x.

⁶⁴ Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

⁶⁵ Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 45.

⁶⁶ Katherine Binhammer, “The Whore’s Love,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 509-510. Project Muse.

of charity. Less altruistic publishers printed their own version of Magdalen narratives that maintained the central narrative, but embedded it in an eroticized ‘coming-of-age’ story.⁶⁷ With the public’s growing fascination for celebrity and depictions of private life, later decades of the century saw the development of a new genre, the “whore biography,” that purported to be ‘true-life’ stories of famous courtesans, actresses, and scandalous noblewomen.⁶⁸

Erotica also had a place in the periodical press. Periodicals such *Harris’s List of Covent Garden Ladies*, the *Covent Garden Magazine*, and *The Rambler’s Magazine* form a loose category referred to in this study as the ‘libertine press.’ This category of publications is occasionally referred to as the ‘sporting press,’ or the ‘rambling genre.’ Sporting press is most likely to have been the contemporary term, as prostitutes were occasionally referred to as ‘sporting girls’ and a night looking for sexual misadventure, a ‘sporting evening.’⁶⁹ Jane Rendell refers to the category of works as the ‘rambling genre,’ works that profess to warn newcomers of the dangers of the city, but are, in fact, “alluring... by alluding to aspects of danger in a seductive manner.”⁷⁰ This project refers to these works as the ‘libertine press.’ This allows for the inclusion of a wider range of works, but is also a more apt title. While the sporting press was most likely the contemporary term, sporting no longer carries the same connotations. ‘Rambling genre’ focuses on longer narratives, and as a result excludes a number of periodicals that cover the same material and served the same purpose. ‘Libertine press’ encompasses both

⁶⁷ Caroline Gonda, "Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: Women in the Public Eye," in *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 61.; Binhammer, "The Whore's Love," 514.

⁶⁸ Lynda M Thompson, *The Scandalous Memoirists: Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington, and the Shame of 'Pyblich Fame'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3.

⁶⁹ Randolph Trumbach, *Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London*, vol. 1 of *Sex and the Gender Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 178, 203.

⁷⁰ Jane Rendall, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space, and Architecture in Regency London* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 32.

periodicals and individual works, and acknowledges the explicitly sexual nature of the works.

In 1757, Sam Derrick began publishing *Harris's List of Covent Garden Beauties*, a catalogue of mid-level London prostitutes that would be published annually until 1795. There is some ambiguity surrounding dates of publication and authorship. Elizabeth Denlinger argues that London waiter Jack Harris, Covent Garden's notorious "Pimp-General," began the list unofficially in 1747, and simply formalized it in 1757. She contends that Harris subsequently sub-contracted with writers, including a London writer named Sam Derrick, which accounts for the variation in writing styles over the years.⁷¹ Hallie Rubenhold, argues, in contrast, that Derrick came to financial terms with Harris, likely through an up-front payment for the use of his name, and wrote and published the *List* himself until his death in 1769.⁷² For a number of years following Derrick's death, *Harris's List* moved from publisher to publisher, ultimately landing with brothers John and James Roach in the late-1780s.⁷³ While it continued to sell consistently, the tenor of the entries and the descriptions of the women changed materially, as the Roach brothers attempted to "clean up" the *List* by formalizing the language and transforming individualized, descriptive entries into "interchangeable...stock seduction stories."⁷⁴ This editorial change was a direct response to the increasingly pervasive middle-class "notions of gentility."⁷⁵ The evolution of *Harris's List* is an interesting illustration of the contest between the discourses of libertine license and middle-class propriety. Prostitution did

⁷¹ Elizabeth Campbell Denlinger, "The Garment and the Man: Masculine Desire in Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies, 1764-1793," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 3 (July 2002): 370, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704587>.

⁷² Hallie Rubenhold, *Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies: Sex in the City in Georgian Britain* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), 13.

⁷³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. "Roach, John (fl. 1789–1796)," by Barbara M. Benedict, accessed June 22, 2013, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/23703.

⁷⁴ Denlinger, "The Garment and the Man," 385.

⁷⁵ Rubenhold, *Harris's List*, 21-2.

not disappear, as evidenced by the ongoing popularity of the *List*. However, the changes in language and in tone demonstrate the power of the new bourgeois construction of sexuality and of acceptable femininity that allowed them to force compliance even from arenas that dealt explicitly with sex and prostitution.

While *Harris's List* appeared annually, most libertine periodicals appeared monthly. The earliest was *Covent Garden Magazine, or The Amorous Repository*. Advertisements placed in the daily and weekly press prior to its initial publication in July 1772 promised a venue where “the gay, the voluptuous, the witty, and jocose, will be introduced into the company of the choice votaries of *Bacchus* and *Venus*, and enabled to figure with *eclat* at...all places of elegant entertainment.” It also professed its goal to be the “entertainment of the polite world, and the finishing of a young gentleman’s education.”⁷⁶ In practice, the magazine offered serialized erotic stories, reader contributions, society gossip, social commentary, and fashion trends. *The Covent Garden Magazine* folded in 1775, and was followed by *The Rambler's Magazine, or The Annals of Gallantry Glee, Pleasure, and the Bon Ton* from 1783 to 1790. *The Covent Garden Magazine*, in particular, demonstrates the relative openness of libertine culture in the mid-eighteenth century. While it did include coverage of elite courtesans, it devoted more attention to the sexual adventuring—proven or alleged—of female aristocrats. Social commentary, society gossip, coverage of elite courtesans, and serialized erotica all appeared together with relatively little complaint. The late eighteenth-century iteration of *The Rambler's Magazine* published a similar assortment of material, but over the course of its run, essays, letters to the editor, and editorials took on an increasingly moralistic tone, even as they appeared alongside erotic fiction.

⁷⁶ *London Evening Post*, July 18-21, 1772. Burney Collection.

Over the first decades of the nineteenth century, a number of different publishers attempted revivals of *The Rambler's Magazine*.⁷⁷ The only identifiable publisher is political radical and “insurrectionary conspirator” William Benbow, who supported himself as a printer, publisher, and pamphleteer. Benbow’s catalogue betrays both of his interests, with political satire, caricature, and erotica all present.⁷⁸ *The Rambler's Magazine*, now subtitled, *or, Fashionable Emporium of Polite Literature*, also reflected Benbow’s varied interests.⁷⁹ Earlier iterations of the periodical had only included political narrative in the form of gossip regarding the lovers of elite courtesans. Under Benbow’s stewardship, however, *The Rambler* took on an explicit, at times vitriolic, political and class narrative, in addition to the expected serial erotica and letters from readers.

Publishing was a chancy career in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Britain. Political involvement could easily lead to legal difficulties—Benbow, in fact, spent eight months in prison awaiting trial for publishing a caricature of King George IV.⁸⁰—but erotica could be equally fraught. Like the publications themselves, however, the consequences changed significantly over time. In 1749, John Cleland, along with the printer and the publisher of *Fanny Hill*, was convicted of publishing obscenity. However, while *Fanny Hill* was banned immediately—and even the subsequent ‘Bowdlerized’ version was deemed obscene—he does not seem to have suffered any further consequences. In fact, his obituary reports that he was “‘rescued from the like temptation’ of writing other obscene works by a government pension of ‘£100 per year which he

⁷⁷ Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Bibliography of Prohibited Books: Bio-Biblio-Icono-Graphical and Critical Notes on Curious, Uncommon and Erotic Books, by Pisanus Fraxi* (1879; repr., London: J. Brussel, 1962), 3: 327-38.

⁷⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Benbow, William (b. 1784, d. in or after 1852)," by Malcolm Chase, last modified January 2008, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/47096.

⁷⁹ Ashbee, *Bibliography of Forbidden Books*, 3:333.

⁸⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Benbow, William (b. 1784, d. in or after 1852)," by Malcolm Chase, last modified January 2008, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/47096.

enjoyed to his death.”⁸¹ George Allen, the publisher of the *Coven Garden Magazine*, was similarly convicted of publishing obscenity.⁸² Allen spent a month in prison, but upon release, returned to the *Covent Garden Magazine* and continued his career without any further interruption.

William Benbow, on the other hand, was brought to trial several times throughout the 1820s in connection to his publishing activities. In 1822, he faced charges of publishing obscene libel in *The Rambler’s Magazine*, which, had he been convicted, would have cost him a minimum of eight months in prison.⁸³ Like Cleland in 1749, the charges against Benbow in 1823 arose from words—in this case, “The Amours, Adventures, and Intrigues of the Chevalier de Faublas,”—rather than an image, but the long prison sentence had he been convicted illustrate the degree to which society had changed. John Roach, the last publisher of *Harris’s List* was also charged with publishing obscenity. Like Allen in 1773, Roach was convicted in 1795 of publishing an obscene image, but rather than the month-long sentence handed down against Allen, Roach served a year in prison.

The sharply different encounters with the legal system are another clear illustration of the impact of bourgeois propriety on libertine society. By 1825, changes in London’s social and cultural landscape had transformed print culture. The increasing dominance of middle-class ideals of respectability had driven the publication of (and market for) erotica underground. Print culture became, instead, a significant tool in

⁸¹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biographies*, s.v. "Cleland, John (bap. 1710, d. 1789)," by Peter Sabor, accessed June 18, 2013, last modified January 2006, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/5595.

⁸² *The London Chronicle or Universal Evening Post*, November 27-30, 1773.

⁸³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "Benbow, William (b. 1784, d. in or after 1852)," by Malcolm Chase, last modified January 2008, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/47096.

advancing a bourgeois agenda of gentility, politeness, and good taste policed by internalized standards of behavior.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29.

CHAPTER II:
“RESTORING LUSTRE TO VIRTUE”:
THE TRIUMPH OF PROPRIETY IN THE POPULAR PRESS

Popular print culture in the latter decades of the eighteenth century was the site of a contest for cultural dominance between the libertine culture of the aristocracy and the upright propriety of the middle class. While the elite had traditionally determined cultural mores, as the middle class grew in economic and political power, so too did their social and cultural influence. One central point of contention was the public narrative surrounding sexuality and female propriety. Aristocratic libertine culture espoused a relatively open discussion of sexuality and a broader construction of acceptable female behavior. Over the last decades of the eighteenth century, that libertine cultural narrative would be challenged, and ultimately defeated, by a new cultural narrative that embraced middle-class values of restraint and self-discipline, and incorporated a significantly narrower construction of proper femininity.

While assigning causality, especially to social or cultural trends, is always problematic, the expansion of the press was largely a factor of the expansion of the middle class—not just as consumers, but also as producers. Historians generally date the beginning of the modern British press to 1702 and the founding of London’s first daily

newspaper, the *Daily Courant*. Over the next century, fueled by what Joad Raymond describes as a “nearly pathological interest in reading and hearing news,” the press grew exponentially.¹ By mid-century, London boasted five dailies, six tri-weeklies, and five weeklies, as well as a thriving “unstamped and unregistered” press.² Throughout the early decades of the century, heavy taxation meant that many newspapers “operated at the financial margins,” relying on elite patronage to stay afloat.³ In addition, while literacy was steadily increasing, especially in urban centers, readership for newspapers and periodicals was still concentrated among the elite.⁴ As a result, the press largely reflected elite values and interests. Beginning in the 1780s, as newspapers were increasingly owned by individuals or small groups of investors, primarily from the middle class, they began to advance their own political and economic interests. As a result, it was their interests and values that would come to shape the press, both in terms of content and worldview, over the last decades of the eighteenth century.

While the counter-narrative condemning sexual license and female impropriety had always been a part of the public sphere, throughout the early decades of the eighteenth century it was largely relegated to the fringes of the popular conversation. Beginning in the 1770s, and gaining authority and adherents across the 1780s and 1790s, those voices were increasingly incorporated into broader social commentary through the mainstream press. At the same time, however, the libertine narrative expanded throughout popular print culture. ‘Visual’ print culture such as satirical prints and portraiture regularly depicted elite courtesans, explicitly acknowledging their role in

¹ Joad Raymond, *News, Newspapers, and Society in Early Modern Britain* (London: F. Cass, 1999), 109.

² Mick Temple, *The British Press* (New York: Open University Press, 2008), 13.

³ Kevin Williams, *Read All About It! A History of the British Newspaper* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 50.

⁴ Temple, *The British Press*, 15.

society. As did the mainstream press, which moved beyond coverage of aristocratic sexual scandals to include extensive coverage of elite courtesans. The ‘libertine press’ also expanded with broader coverage, higher circulation, and more titles. Bob Harris argues that because the press during the latter decades of the eighteenth century “had yet to develop a separate or distinctive identity... it acted as a fairly accurate mirror to the fissures...[within] propertied society during the period.”⁵ By the early-nineteenth century, the press would develop an “increasingly distinctive *collective* identity” which was culturally bourgeois in attitude, especially concerning matters of propriety and sexuality.⁶

This growing opposition to aristocratic cultural dominance is especially clear in the evolving treatment of women in both the mainstream and the libertine press. The libertine narrative, strongest earlier in the period, applauded female assertiveness, recognized female sexuality, and was remarkably open about the role of prostitution in general, and courtesans in particular. As the middle-class narrative gained purchase, competing voices joined the conversation, challenging the libertine construction of women both actively, by attacking the libertine construction of femininity, and passively, by presenting their own version of proper womanhood. The tension between these competing narratives, and the steady incursion of middle-class propriety into elite libertine culture, is clear in the disparate depictions of women, particularly courtesans, in the popular press. Differences in tone, in language, and in subject matter demonstrate both the competing narratives themselves and the resonance of those narratives in the popular public sphere.

⁵ Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 74.

⁶ Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 79.

Aristocratic Libertinage in the Popular Press

Cultural mores had long been determined by the aristocracy, which, throughout the eighteenth century, had largely embraced Enlightenment thought. Peter Cryle and Lisa O’Connell argue that Enlightenment ideals were often “vernacularized” through society by means of “sexual talk and action, as much anything.”⁷ Rather than the limited definition of libertine culture as simply the “sexually-free behavior and norms of upper-class men,” Cryle and O’Connell argue that libertinism is, instead, a “delicate negotiation with conventional moral, religious, and civil codes.”⁸ In the case of mid-eighteenth century England, elite culture encompassed not merely a greater degree of sexual license for elite men, but a new openness about sexuality in general, as well as a reconfiguration of acceptable femininity. Mainstream newspapers largely reflected elite cultural values, espousing traditional Enlightenment ideals of “urbanity, tolerance, conviviality, [and] modernity,” as well as an image of elite femininity that encompassed a position in the public sphere, an active sexual nature, and a degree of assertiveness.⁹

Beginning in the 1770s, however, there was a steadily increasing urgency to the “didactic” or “instructive” role of the press. Jeremy Back notes that despite the expansion in publication and readership over the first half of the eighteenth century, there was little change in content or style.¹⁰ As competition between papers grew, however, editors began to expand content to appeal to a wider readership, adding literary and theatrical reviews, social commentary, fashion trends, and gossip columns. This period also saw an increasing number of “moral essays,” often inserted by the publisher, and letters to the

⁷ Cryle and O’Connell, *Libertine Enlightenment*, 2.

⁸ Cryle and O’Connell, *Libertine Enlightenment* 2.

⁹ Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 66.

¹⁰ Black, *English Press*, 18.

editor condemning the “profligacy of the age” and offering dire warnings if society, especially women, did not return to traditional values.¹¹

The libertine culture largely embraced by the press during the mid-eighteenth century was characterized by a remarkable frankness regarding sexuality and sexual misconduct. Central to the libertine narrative of eighteenth-century England was the acceptance that sexual desire—in both men and women—was natural and therefore healthy.¹² While sexual misadventure on the part of aristocratic men was nothing new, Vic Gatrell argues that the “phallogentricity” of eighteenth-century libertinism and the acceptance of female sexuality implicitly sanctioned the same sexual adventuring in women that was commonly accepted in men.¹³ In the popular press of the 1770s, this narrative can be seen most clearly through coverage of sexual scandals of elite women.

Throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, there was widespread public perception of sexual misadventure by elite women. While the press no doubt exaggerated the extent of female libertinage, they did not invent it out of whole cloth. The mid-eighteenth century did see a clear rise in court cases arising from adultery, in both the aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie.¹⁴ In a speech before Parliament, Lord Pomfret “complained bitterly that ‘they got no business done that session on account of those damn’d divorces. Every wife (sayd he) that can creep into a back room or a corner is a whore.’”¹⁵ Donna Andrews argues that the public debate surrounding “female virtue” went far beyond the popular press, spurring four bills before Parliament, numerous debate

¹¹ Black, *English Press*, 173.

¹² Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (New York: Walker & Co, 2007), 298.

¹³ Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 305.

¹⁴ Donna T. Andrews, “Adultery à la Mode: Privilege, the Law, and Attitudes to Adultery, 1620-1800,” *History* 82, no. 265 (January 1997): 6.

¹⁵ Quoted in Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People : England 1727-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 582.

society meetings, and ultimately, a concerted effort to “reform public manners” and reshape the public attitude towards the “aristocratic code of license.”¹⁶

The libertine press noted the “fashion so prevalent among ladies of the first rank of retaliating the infidelities of their husbands,”¹⁷ and applauded “professed female libertines...those ladies whom no laws can restrain within the lines of constancy..., but break through the fences of modesty and roam at large.”¹⁸ The first edition of *Covent Garden Magazine* in 1772, presents a dialogue between the celebrated brothel owner Charlotte Hayes and her ‘nuns.’ In it, Hayes remarks that the “scandalous innovations of women of quality, who sport for their amusement...has cut our business to the quick.”¹⁹ The mainstream press was somewhat more restrained, but nonetheless published regular blind items keeping readers up to date on the latest scandals in the *bon ton*. The *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* included a story about “Lady G----,” who “has placed the whole of her artillery against the dwelling house of a young linen-draper, who...has already made propositions for capitulation.”²⁰ The next year, the same paper noted that, “Lady H---- was present [at a masquerade] about an hour after the doors opened, but retired almost immediately, finding it too cool an entertainment for the warmth of her animal spirit.”²¹

Letters to the editors show a mixed public response to this narrative. Some were generally supportive, like the contributor who commented in *Town & Country* in 1772 that, “Notwithstanding all the sarcasms and attacks that have been made upon the ladies

¹⁶ Andrews, “Adultery à la Mode,” 5.

¹⁷ *Covent Garden Magazine, or The Amorous Repository* (London: G. Allen, in Pater-noster Row, 1772), 1: 69.

¹⁸ *Covent Garden Magazine*, 2: 6.

¹⁹ *Covent Garden Magazine*, 1: 2.

²⁰ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, November 11, 1776. Burney Collection.

²¹ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, June 26, 1777. Burney Collection.

for their supposed remarkable want of chastity at this period, I think there is much to be said in their favour. While their husbands keep three or four mistresses, who constantly appear at all public places. . . dressed superior to their wives, it must naturally excite their jealousy and resentment.”²² Others were rather less so, like the contributor to the *Public Advertiser* who bemoaned the fact that, “so contagious are grown the vices and follies of the great, that unless some legislative check soon be found for the growing evils of *female dissipation*, there will be nothing lovely and *womanlike* left to console us!”²³

With the widespread embrace of the libertine narrative and its fundamental acceptance of sex as natural and healthy came a striking openness about prostitution in general and the role of the courtesan in particular. This period saw the creation of the celebrity courtesan—women who moved beyond the role of professional mistress to become celebrities in their own right. Both the mainstream press and the libertine press covered the world of ‘gallantry’ and individual courtesans in detail and at length. Press coverage of public entertainment included the presence of elite courtesans as a matter of course, as well as attendance by celebrated “abbesses” and their “nuns.”²⁴ The *General Evening Post* included a regular “Cyprian Intelligence” column that reported on the living and travel arrangements, liaisons, and general gossip about popular courtesans. The *London Evening Post*’s “Masquerade Intelligence” included not simply which courtesans attended, but also their costumes, quips, and escorts.

²² *Town and Country Magazine; or, Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment* (London: Printed for A. Hamilton, Junr. near St. John's-Gate, 1772), III: 321. Google books.

²³ *Public Advertiser*, November 17, 1776. Burney Collection.

²⁴ Despite the permissive tone of society, the world of sexual misconduct was acknowledged through oddly classical or formal terms. Sexual misconduct was referred to ‘gallantry’ or ‘intrigue.’ Elite courtesans were referred to as the “Cyprian Corps,” lesser courtesans as “fashionable impures.” Prostitutes were “the frail sisterhood” or said to “worship at the shrine of Venus.” In this case, elite brothels were ‘convents,’ headed by ‘Mother Abesses,’ and staffed by ‘nuns.’

Town & Country's "Tête-à-Tête" series, that presented the 'history' of a different notable affair each month, was probably the most high-profile coverage of the world of gallantry. Cindy McCreery notes, "The list of individuals featured in the *Tête-à-Tête* series resembles a 'who's who' of late-eighteenth century England."²⁵ And it was not just a 'who's who' of high-profile men—begun in 1769, the publishers asserted their intention to "lay before the public a lively idea of the prevailing beauties, and their most zealous admirers."²⁶ The series was so popular that within a year they were determining which 'histories' to include based on reader requests. February 1770's entry opened with, "The hero of this story has rendered himself so celebrated in the annals of gallantry, that we have received several letters...requested his being admitted to our tête-à-têtes."²⁷

While McCreery argues that the emphasis of the 'histories' was so weighted towards the men that the women were "interchangeable," both the women they chose to include and the way they were discussed demonstrates the contemporary attitudes towards courtesans and towards female sexual misconduct.²⁸ January 1770's *Tête-à-Tête* approvingly reports on a long-term relationship between "Mrs. T----s," the wife of a Member of Parliament, and a London alderman coyly referred to as "the Father of the City." In detailing their relationship, the story emphasizes the "genuine passion on each side" and defends the lady's character, by asserting that "it is not to be imagined that this alliance is on either side founded on mercenary principles."²⁹ To further legitimize the relationship, they also note, "The attention paid to this kind lady by Sir R----'s children,

²⁵ Cindy McCreery, "Keeping up with the Bon Ton: The Tête-à-Tête Series in the *Town and Country Magazine*," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities*, ed. Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (London; New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), 209.

²⁶ *Town & Country*, I: 13. Google books.

²⁷ *Town & Country*, II: 94. Google books.

²⁸ McCreery, "Keeping up with the Bon Ton," 219.

²⁹ *Town & Country*, II: 65. Google books.

whose constant visits... testify to a kind of filial affection to her.”³⁰ In contrast, the ‘history’ in the June, 1770 edition reports that the Miss K---y [Kitty Kennedy, a high-profile courtesan at the time], had “prudently accepted” Lord R--- S---’s protection, which would “probably render her fame still more extensive in the juridical and political worlds.”³¹ The acceptance of both a genuine, if illegitimate, relationship between relative equals and a frankly calculating liaison between courtesan and client illustrates the acceptance of a broader range of acceptable femininity.

While the tenor of the public conversation regarding female sexual impropriety was for the most part accepting, close reading of newspapers of the 1770s reveals the early beginnings of the conflicting narratives of gender construction, sexuality, and class that would dominate press coverage throughout the 1780s and 1790s. While social commentary largely reflected the libertine values of the elite, an awareness of class differences was also clearly present. This particular mix of elite sexual and gender constructions and an awareness of class boundaries is clearest in the press coverage of the opening of the Pantheon in 1772. The Pantheon, a set of assembly rooms patterned after Bath and Carlisle House, blurred the lines between public and private, and between elite and bourgeois. Management of the Pantheon was divided among “Subscribers,” primarily middle-class men whose money financed it, and “Proprietors,” elite women whose social capital was to guarantee its success.³² These groups’ conflicting motivations would be echoed in the public controversy that surrounded their opening. The initial plan for admittance required both the purchase of a ticket and “the endorsement of a peeress.”³³

³⁰ *Town & Country*, II: 66. Google books.

³¹ *Town & Country*, II: 290. Google books.

³² Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability, and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge, UK): Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91.

³³ Russell, *Women, Sociability, and Theatre*, 93.

By requiring elite connections, the Proprietors hoped to restrict participation to the ‘polite society.’ Despite their best efforts, however, opening night saw a number of elite courtesans in attendance. The Proprietors first attempted to have the “ladies of easy virtue” removed quietly by their Master of Ceremonies. Not only did the women refuse to leave, however, more attended the following night in anticipation of increased press coverage.

In attempt to control the situation, the Proprietors placed an ad in the papers, acknowledging that a number of “women of the town... by some means or other procured admission.” They continued, asserting, “If any such women should apply for the future, they will not be admitted, and if they should... the Proprietors are determined to have them turned out at once.”³⁴ In the week following the opening and the Proprietors’ warning, the press expanded coverage of Pantheon events and exploded with letters to the editor and editorial commentary. The ensuing public discussion raised issues of gender, of sexuality, and of class that demonstrate the relative openness of the mid-eighteenth century, the gender and societal norms of the day, and the early expression of class solidarity. The public response almost universally supported the right of women of the town to be admitted to the Pantheon for a number of different reasons. The official coverage of the *General Evening Post* defended the courtesans, noting that while a “considerable number of the sisterhood was present last night at the Pantheon,...their behavior was wholly unexceptionable, and had they not been well-known, it would have been impossible to distinguish them from the most delicate part of the company.”³⁵ A letter to the editor commented that, “Such women will intrude into every gay place,” and

³⁴ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, January 30, 1772. Burney Collection.

³⁵ *General Evening Post*, Feb 6, 1772. Burney Collection.

the proper response was simply to ignore them.³⁶ Yet another asserted that they had earned the right to attend “through the appearance of elegance and decency.”³⁷

Numerous contributors commented that barring ‘women of the town’ was not just futile, but illogical. One letter to the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* commented sarcastically, “I fancy the company at the Pantheon hardly found any visible alteration in the atmosphere from the actual existence of *two* or *three* women of no character among seven or eight hundred others, who I presume not being pointed out by the advertisement, were *all* virtuous.”³⁸ Another letter in the same edition was more blunt, remarking that, “to pretend that none but ladies of character shall compose their assembly proves them dribblers.”³⁹ Other contributors focused on more practical issues. A contributor to the *Middlesex Journal, or Chronicle of Liberty* pointed out the financial repercussions of barring courtesans, asking, “Can you know so little of the world as to be ignorant that in excluding these ladies, you would exclude half the men?”⁴⁰ Another noted that not only were their prices too high, but “you have laid down the rule for admission, you have sold tickets according to that rule, and those ladies you have taken exception to, you can have no right to exclude if they have tickets.”⁴¹ One contributor to the *General Evening Post* clearly perceived the situation as a challenge to masculine authority, asking, “Can the Proprietors imagine that *Gentlemen* can permit such an insult and snub treatment to a pretty woman? Whose behavior does not give offense and is as innocent as any lady in the room?”⁴²

³⁶ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1772. Burney Collection.

³⁷ *Gazetteer and New daily Advertiser*, February 6, 1772. Burney Collection.

³⁸ *Gazetteer & New Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1772. Burney Collection.

³⁹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴⁰ *Middlesex Journal, or Chronicle of Liberty*, February 1-4, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴¹ *Middlesex Journal, or Chronicle of Liberty*, February 1-4, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴² *General Evening Post*, February 3, 1772. Burney Collection.

An editorial in the *Gazetteer* contended that even attempting to bar courtesans was pointless, as, “It is now too difficult to draw the line between women of character and women of the town, as the first have lowered themselves by their behavior, as much as the latter have raised themselves through the appearance of elegance and decency.”⁴³ This comment highlights another theme present in numerous letters. While the public largely supported the right of courtesans to attend events at the Pantheon, it was not, for the most part, based on support of the women themselves, but rather a comment on aristocratic hypocrisy. One letter to the editor of the *Gazetteer* asserted that there should be “no distinction as to rank and fortune, only virtue.”⁴⁴

Letter after letter condemned the hypocrisy of aristocratic ladies barring courtesans for the very behavior of which they themselves were guilty. One particularly scathing letter condemns the Proprietors for “refusing to receive a whore unless she brings in her hand a recommendation from an adulteress.”⁴⁵ Despite the newspapers’ generally positive coverage of elite female sexual misconduct, many contributors responded by condemning such behavior. One contributor who asked, “If all women of infamous character are to be excluded from the Pantheon, by what means may the peeresses, without exception, be admitted, since many coroneted ladies are to the full as profligate as the meanest street-walker.”⁴⁶ Another argued that courtesans were “reduced to the necessity of showing themselves in...the rounds of the Pantheon,” simply to compete with the “ladies of fashion.”⁴⁷ In the face of this backlash, the Subscribers, concerned for their investment, placed another ad in the papers, this one announcing that

⁴³ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 4, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴⁴ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 6, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴⁵ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 5, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴⁶ *Middlesex Journal, or Chronicle of Liberty*, February 1-4, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁴⁷ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1772. Burney Collection.

they recognized that it was “not convenient for ladies to always carry the certificates of their marriages about them.” As a result, “the Subscribers were resolved, in opposition to the managers, to protect any ladies who seek admittance holding a ticket.”⁴⁸

This controversy highlights the nature of the clash of societal discourses taking place in popular print culture in the 1770s. Despite the generally approving tenor of editorials and the ‘official’ press coverage of elite women’s sexual scandals, such stories drew an increasingly negative response from the largely middle-class reading public. This rift illustrates the growing tension between libertine cultural values, embraced by newspaper editors trying to appeal to an elite audience, and the values of the overwhelmingly bourgeois urban readership. It also demonstrates that the controversy was far more about class perception than ‘family values’ at this point. One letter to the *Middlesex Journal* made that point explicit, commenting that, “The absurdity of your plan in supposing the gentry of this kingdom would condescend to petition a peeress for leave to subscribe, met with that sovereign contempt it merited.”⁴⁹ If the controversy were about sexual propriety, readers would have attacked *both* the courtesans and the Proprietors. Contributors’ overwhelming support for the courtesans’ right to attend Pantheon events demonstrated the degree to which courtesans were recognized as part of the popular public sphere, as well as public awareness, even acceptance, of female sexuality. The controversy also shows that, at this early stage, the libertine construction of acceptable femininity as self-determining was not yet an issue. While later public debate would increasingly insist on passivity as key to female virtue, at this point, no one questioned the right of the Proprietors to set the standards, merely their *choice* of

⁴⁸ *Town & Country*, IV, 69. Google books.

⁴⁹ *Middlesex Journal, or Chronicle of Liberty*, February 1-4, 1772. Burney Collection.

standards. While the Proprietors (women) were ultimately overruled by the Subscribers (men), they were overruled not because they were women, but because their choices were condemned by public opinion and would result in a loss of business.

Celebrity Courtesans and Cultural Discord

Over the course of the next two decades, this struggle for cultural dominance would become increasingly strident, with the competition taking place not just between papers, but in them. By the late-eighteenth century, newspapers were no longer the blatant ‘party organs’ they had been earlier in the century. However, neither had they reached the level of professionalism that would come with the development of the “sovereign editor,” who determined editorial policy and used papers to advance a particular class or political narrative.⁵⁰ Instead, newspapers in the 1780s and 1790s reflected the fractious nature of late-eighteenth century society. As the elite and the increasingly influential bourgeoisie each sought to assert cultural dominance, popular print culture became a central, and very visible, battleground.

This lack of editorial coherence was especially complicated by the fact that an enormous amount of newspaper content was culled from reader contributions. Jeremy Black notes that the “constant demand for material,” and the relative lack of staff or funding to gather material for themselves, forced newspapers to accept reader contributions with “the minimum of explanation or abbreviation.”⁵¹ Bob Harris argues that this divide between content and ownership makes it “difficult to establish a pattern of

⁵⁰ Williams, *Read All About It!*, 17-18.

⁵¹ Black, *English Press*, 205.

causality” or to “discern much chronological pattern in the social criticism.”⁵² However, as we move from the 1770s through to the end of the century, there is a noticeable weakening of the libertine narrative and growing endorsement of middle-class values that is clear in shifts of tone and subject matter throughout the popular press.

The 1770s were characterized by a rift between management and audience. Over the course of the 1780s and 1790s, that rift slowly closed, until editorials and letters to the editor reflected the same values, and were, to a large extent, interchangeable. This demonstrates not merely the growing self-assertion of the bourgeoisie, but also the power of the popular public sphere to advance a specific cultural narrative. Habermas argues that the original role of the public sphere was to serve as a critical audience for state actions. Over time, however, state and private interests became increasingly intertwined. That is, as private individuals increasingly had a financial or political stake in public policy, they lost their objectivity and, as a result, their legitimacy as an advising body.⁵³ Habermas contends that at this point the public sphere, as he conceived it, ceased to exist. He argues that as nothing more than a “culture consuming” entity, the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ had become a “public sphere in appearance only.”⁵⁴ However, the growing dominance of the discourse of middle-class propriety across the latter decades of the eighteenth century and the appropriation of the popular press to serve as an agent of those values, demonstrates the power of the popular public sphere to affect broad changes in society.

Early in the period, readers began openly calling for newspaper publishers to renounce aristocratic libertine ideals and reflect their own values. A letter to the *Morning*

⁵² Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 78.

⁵³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 176.

⁵⁴ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 171.

Herald in 1782 illustrates this theme, complaining that, “These prostituted characters are no subject for a paper such as the *Morning Herald*. They are not proper entertainment for the breakfast tables of modest families.” The writer goes on to argue that coverage of elite courtesans “creates the belief that these *girls of the Town* are the whole entertainment of polite circles throughout the metropolis,” and asks that, “Their impure conduct never again sully the pages of the *Morning Herald*.”⁵⁵ While most papers responded to these attitudes by gradually incorporating more letters and editorials embracing middle-class values and slowly eliminating libertine commentary, some were more outspoken about it. In June 1782, the *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer* explicitly announced a change in editorial policy: “*Cyprian Intelligence Extraordinary*, however it may meet a reception in a notorious *Morning Paper*, and however warm colouring may be an amusement to some individuals, cannot be admitted in the *General Advertiser*, whose principal endeavor is to improve, not debauch the morals of the public.”⁵⁶ In publicly endorsing urban bourgeois values, the *General Advertiser* was not just attacking a rival publication, but no doubt hoping to raise their readership by responding to widespread complaints by readers that their values were not being represented in the popular press.

The majority of papers, however, shifted narratives more subtly. During this process, the conflicting narratives often appeared alongside each other, as in the January 15, 1788 edition of the *Morning Herald*, featuring a letter to the editor addressing the “lack of virtue and morality” in the current theater offerings across the city. The contributor noted that “the necessary liberties of the stage are unfavorable to decency”

⁵⁵ *Morning Herald*, March 1, 1782. Burney Collection.

⁵⁶ *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, June 7, 1782. Burney Collection.

and that “parents who regard the future honor and delicacy of their children should hesitate” to expose them to such material. Directly underneath this letter was a blind item about “Another *faux pas* in high circles” detailing the story of a young woman who abandoned her husband to run away with a member of her household staff.⁵⁷

We also see these conflicting narratives overlapping in a single piece, as exemplified by a story in the *General Evening Post*'s Cyprian Intelligence column in March 1784 ‘introducing’ a newly-arrived courtesan. The piece begins by complimenting her as, “a woman of some degree of fashion [rank in society]...her beauty places her above all other competitors...[and] it is said she possesses an understanding superior to most of her sex.” The item concludes less complementarily, however, adding that her “elopement...from a deserving husband who possessed rank, fortune, and every accomplishment a reasonable woman could desire will ever stamp her name with indelible disgrace.”⁵⁸ A similar piece in December of the same year, comments on “the welcome addition to the *frail sisterhood* of a certain Lady in high life,” but also notes that despite “all the comforts of this world, she abandoned a young and doting husband, and has initiated herself among the dissolute, vying with the most extravagant of them.”⁵⁹ These pieces demonstrate the conflicted nature of the press during this period and the growing power of the bourgeois audience. The papers could not entirely ignore the world of aristocratic sexual license. They did, however, color their reporting with enough middle-class scorn to make their growing disapproval obvious to their readers.

The discussion of moral versus entertainment value of the theater became a regular point of discussion, with theatrical reviews slowly adding moral considerations to

⁵⁷ *Morning Herald*, January 15, 1788. Burney Collection.

⁵⁸ *Morning Herald*, March 30, 1784. Burney Collection.

⁵⁹ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, December 16, 1784. Burney Collection.

their aesthetic opinions. More than the plays themselves, however, was the question of the moral value of attending the theater at all. This question was further complicated by the fact that the theater, as a form of public entertainment, drew women from every level of prostitution. Lower level prostitutes thronged the theater lobbies, mid-level prostitutes filled the pit, and elite courtesans occupied boxes. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s, press coverage of the theaters regularly commented on which courtesans attended the theater, in whose box, and which men called on them during intermission. By the late-1780s, commentary on the theater had shifted considerably. In 1786, an editorial in the *Morning Herald* takes the management of the King's Theater to task for ignoring the "repeated outcry against the *frail sisterhood*," asking, "Is there no possibility of remedying this evil," and noting that if not, "the place will soon be deserted by every lover of decorum and order."⁶⁰ A letter to the editor of the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* the next month expressed similar outrage towards the Little Theater, complaining that, "The magistrates occasionally clear the public streets of the Cyprian Corps. Why then is the lobby of the Little Theater exempted from a visit, which is now become a nuisance to every decent person who ventures to the Theater."⁶¹ Architects overseeing the construction of the new Drury Lane Theater in 1789 seem to have listened to these complaints, as evidenced by approving commentary from the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* explaining, "One row of boxes is to be reserved for the *Cyprian Corps*, and the strictest precaution is to be taken to prevent their intrusion into any other part of the theater."⁶² Quite different from the spirited defense of courtesans during the Pantheon furor in 1772, when one letter to the editor speculated, "Suppose the manager of a

⁶⁰ *Morning Herald*, May 5, 1786. Burney Collection.

⁶¹ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, June 8, 1786. Burney Collection.

⁶² *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, October 30, 1789. Burney Collection.

Playhouse was to attempt taking any lady of easy virtue out of his boxes—what would be the consequences? Why he would soon be taught that the 5s the lady paid entitled her to a seat, and the manager must protect her from insult or a British audience would show a British spirit.”⁶³

The libertine narrative, most obvious in the gossip columns and coverage of public entertainment, while declining generally across the latter decades of the eighteenth century, was nonetheless a part of the popular public sphere. One of clearest indicators of the continued public resonance of libertine culture appears in the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* in January 1785. The publisher of *Harris’s List of Covent Garden Ladies* announced the annual publication of the new edition for 1785, which was followed in February with a number of letters to the paper, thanking ‘Mr. Harris’ for his “collection of Ladies of Pleasure” and commenting that he had “displayed unusual exertions in respect to stile and beauty.”⁶⁴ While newspapers continued to publish regular pieces from contributors that included lists of courtesans’ birthdays, travel plans, and current lovers, the tone had changed. Rather than celebrating ‘women of spirit’ for defying societal traditions, they lauded those elite courtesans “whose manners would adorn a better life.”⁶⁵ In December 1783, the *General Evening Post’s* Cyprian Intelligence column commended Elizabeth Armistead for being “the most decent of the indecent tribe. Her deportment...is in every way commendable.”⁶⁶

Tellingly, the libertine press, devoted to covering the world of gallantry, was equally impacted by the development of the middle-class narrative. The introductory

⁶³ *Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty*, February 1-4, 1772. Burney Collection.

⁶⁴ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, January 5, 1785; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, February 8, 1785. Burney Collection.

⁶⁵ *Morning Herald*, June, 29, 1781; *Morning Herald*, February 11, 1785; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, January, 17, 1781. Burney Collection.

⁶⁶ *General Evening Post*, December 15, 1783. Burney Collection.

issue of *The Rambler's Magazine*, published from 1783 to 1786, professed its goal “to furnish the man of pleasure with a most delicious banquet of amorous, bacchanalian, whimsical, humorous, theatrical, and polite entertainment.”⁶⁷ The magazine content was similar to that of the *Covent Garden Magazine* from a decade earlier, in that it included society gossip, satirical essays, coverage of the more salacious criminal and civil trials, and considerable material culled from reader submissions. Reader submissions, which made up the bulk of the content, included letters to the editor and serialized erotic fiction. Letters to the editor tended to be individual erotic stories that usually opened with statements such as, “Let me assure you that what I am about to describe really happened,” or “I met a young lady, and when I saw she was reading your magazine knew she would be up for a bit of fun.” The serialized erotica, referred to as “semi-erotic miscellanies” in Henry Spencer Ashbee’s *Bibliography of Forbidden Books*, included stories such as “Adventures of a Bedstead,” “Letters on Flagellation,” and “Cytherian Discussions” that often stretched over several months.⁶⁸ Interestingly, the magazine also included relatively detailed coverage of female fashion trends, as well as numerous advertisements aimed at a female audience—suggesting some degree of female readership.

Alongside the erotica and gossip, however, were a surprising number of editorials, essays, and letters to the editor condemning libertine sexual excesses and, especially, the libertine construction of acceptable female behavior. For the most part, the intrusion of the middle-class narrative into the libertine press focused on female behavior. The condemnation of female libertinage went beyond simply sexual license, to include attacks

⁶⁷ *The Rambler's Magazine*, vol 1: 1.

⁶⁸ Ashbee, *Bibliography of Prohibited Books*, 3:329-338.

on women for “a rooted love for what is showy, frivolous, and expensive.”⁶⁹ An essay in the June 1783 issue on the importance of marriage asserts that, “This spirit of libertinage, now abroad in the world, subverts the definition of even the best women.” It notes that, “At present...men marry with reluctance, often very late in life,” and argues that, “It is the expensive luxury of women alone which alone deters them...honest men are frightened at the expenses of the married state, which have become burdensome if not ruinous.”⁷⁰ This essay also reveals the growing impact of separate spheres ideology, arguing that women are “called by nature to a quiet, domestic, and rather retired life,” and should “go into company no oftener than will give a more agreeable relish to the pleasure of...their own firesides.” By “sequestering themselves...even from what is called ‘good company,’ they will no longer interchange vices, follies, and insipidities, but cultivate pleasure, knowledge, and virtue.”⁷¹

The Ranger’s Magazine, published from January to June 1795, reprimands the editors of *The Rambler’s Magazine* for being “too moral, and generally too timid,” and pronounces itself “determined to pursue a contrary conduct.”⁷² However, the first issue includes, alongside such stories as “Adventures of a Rake” and “Memoirs of an English Seraglio,” an essay entitled “Advice to Covent Garden Bucks,” which asserts that, “frequent intercourse with the male sex renders them [women]...poisonous and unfit for use...calloused and infectious.”⁷³ A letter to the editor in March, advises against any involvement with women who have “broken through the fences of chastity,” for they

⁶⁹ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, vol 1: 265.

⁷⁰ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, vol 1: 267.

⁷¹ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, vol 1: 268.

⁷² Ashbee, *Bibliography of Prohibited Books*, 3:337.

⁷³ *The Ranger’s Magazine, or The man of fashion’s companion...* (London: J. Sudbury, No. 16, Tooley St, 1795), 7.

have “already forfeited the most amiable part of female character.”⁷⁴ A similar letter in June notes that if “men would but take a moment to reflect on the great corruption of manners and character that must take place in a woman before she can consent to throw herself upon the town, they would fly their society with horror and detestation.”⁷⁵

As editorial changes increasingly endorsed middle-class values, coverage of aristocratic sex scandals abated sharply, as did the sense of affectionate scolding had characterized earlier reporting. Instead, we see greatly expanded coverage of elite courtesans, though the tone and subject matter shifted subtly. Coverage of elite courtesans during the 1770s was remarkably open about the financial and sexual nature of their relationships. In the 1780s and 1790s, while press coverage continued to report on their financial, travel, and living arrangements, as well as their acknowledged liaisons, the tone grew increasingly coy when it came to the nature of those liaisons. A story about courtesan Kitty Kennedy in the *Covent Garden Magazine* in 1772 reported that she received a visit from a “nabob...which lasted about six hours, for which he paid the moderate price of two thousand pounds,” and congratulating her for “collecting such *impressive* sums upon the road of amorous dalliance.”⁷⁶ In contrast, stories about the financial arrangements of celebrated courtesans in the 1780s and 1790s were vague and disconnected from acknowledged lovers, like the June 29, 1785 story in the *Morning Herald* that proclaimed, “The little *Bird of Paradise* [Gertrude Mahon] is the most *comfortably* arranged of any of the Cyprian Corps.”⁷⁷ The libertine press, while acknowledging the nature of courtesans’ income, nonetheless obscured the identity of

⁷⁴ *The Ranger's Magazine*, 33.

⁷⁵ *The Ranger's Magazine*, 93.

⁷⁶ *Town & Country*, vol 3: 18. Google books.

⁷⁷ *Morning Herald*, June 29, 1782. Burney Collection.

their lovers. *The Rambler's Magazine* in September 1785 reported that, "The celebrated courtesan *Du Thé* is now reveling in the sums she has gleaned from English folly."⁷⁸ If they do discuss money in more specific terms, the tone tends to be vaguely disparaging, like the story in the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* in October, 1784 that notes, "There is a scarcity of cash and credit among them which has seldom been equaled... The *monied cullies* are not yet in Town... political pamphlets are expected to fill up with advertising notices of public females and appear about a week before the meeting of Parliament."⁷⁹

In addition, coverage was increasingly restricted only to those courtesans who had become celebrities in their own right. Throughout the 1770s and early-1780s, "Cyprian Intelligence" and gossip columns included numerous courtesans, mostly referred to by well-known nicknames or through the loose 'disguise' of replacing vowels with dashes. By the late-1780s and 1790s, only the most widely known celebrity courtesans were covered. In September 1795, the *Morning Herald* was still reporting on Elizabeth Armistead and Mary Robinson, despite the fact that neither had been part of the world of gallantry for at least a decade.⁸⁰ One reason for the expanded coverage of elite courtesans was courtesans' own efforts to control their public personas as mediated through the popular press. With the growing the growing "cult of celebrity," celebrity courtesans such as Gertrude Mahon, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Armistead, and Grace Elliot were commodified to the point that the public image took on a life of its own, becoming detached from the woman to become a commodity in and of itself.⁸¹ Thus, Mary

⁷⁸ *The Rambler's Magazine*, September, 1785, 358.

⁷⁹ *Morning Post & Daily Advertiser*, October 19, 1784. Burney Collection.

⁸⁰ *Morning Herald*, September 24, 1795. Burney Collection.

⁸¹ Claire Brock, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 115.

Robinson, the woman, and Perdita, the courtesan, became, to a striking extent, separate entities in the popular public sphere.

Despite this, elite courtesans actively participated in popular print culture in an attempt to assert ownership of their public image. Their goals were twofold. First and foremost, they used the press much as celebrities do today: to enhance their own celebrity, especially at the expense of a rival. Regular accusations of ‘puffery,’ the practice of inserting positive pieces about oneself into the press to raise one’s profile or counter negative coverage, and satirical pieces in both the mainstream and libertine press suggest that there was at least a public perception that this was common practice. While it is, of course, impossible to deem one story a ‘puff’ and another simply press coverage, close examination of context, tone, and subject matter can allow for an educated guess. Secondly, recognizing the tension between elite libertine culture and the growing middle-class narrative, courtesans sought to create a public persona that incorporated both— alluring enough to maintain marketability in elite circles, while emphasizing the ways in which they conformed to the new middle-class construction of femininity.

Mary Robinson, nicknamed Perdita by the press, was without doubt, the most persistent, and likely the most effective, in managing her public persona. Stories about her various romantic connections, her finances, her fashions, and her carriages far outnumber stories about any other courtesan of the day, and the ‘puffs’ are relatively easy to separate from actual press coverage. Puff pieces abound concerning her lavish lifestyle, like the *Morning Herald* story that announces, “The envy of the frail world will soon be called forth by the launch of *Perdita’s* new *Vis-à-Vis*, which certainly surpasses in style and decorative embellishment all the equipages that have hitherto graced the

Cyprian Court.” Similarly flattering stories regarding her popularity appear regularly as well, like the report of her stay in Paris that noted, “the *Perdita*...was much admired at the Paris Opera and never appeared without drawing the attention of the Duc de Chartres and other leading men of fashion into her box.”⁸² Robinson, mindful of the wider audience, however, also inserted stories lauding her personal virtue and “exquisite sensibility.” A February 1783 story in *The Rambler’s Magazine* recounts how a “poor laborer” died while working on her roof. The piece notes that “with a degree of humanity unique to herself,” she arranged for the man’s funeral and a small annuity for the man’s wife. While a bit fawning, it is not out of the question that a friendly reporter wrote the piece. Until the conclusion, that is, which chides her for not publicizing the incident, and ends with an admonition to, “Read this and blush, *ye prudes of virtue!*”⁸³

Actual stories about Perdita tended to be, at the very least, more neutral, and at worst, outright negative. Robinson came to prominence with a short-lived affair with the young Prince of Wales in 1779, during which he wrote her a number of explicit love letters and promised her a generous annuity for life if she became his mistress. The royal family intervened to bring the affair to an end, and claimed the annuity promised by the Prince was invalid as he was underage.⁸⁴ Robinson’s ongoing attempts to force the Prince or the King to pay the annuity made up a significant amount of the regular press coverage for years. A story in August 1781 reported, “The *Perdita*... has by all reports refused a settlement of *6000l*...but holds fast to the amorous lines until she granted *double* the above annuity, and without a speedy compliance threatens to publish them for the world.

⁸² *Morning Herald*, March 9, 1782; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, December, 10, 1781. Burney Collection.

⁸³ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, vol 1: 159-160.

⁸⁴ Paula Byrne, *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, and Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004), 119-130.

When such eminent persons as the parents of Florizel [Prince of Wales] can be threatened by a base p[rostitute], what defect is there in the laws of Britain?”⁸⁵ Having been rebuffed by the royal family, Robinson sought help from members of Court and members of Parliament, and the press tracked her liaisons from influential politician to influential politician. A story in *The Rambler’s Magazine* noted in 1783 that Elizabeth Armistead’s efforts to attract Charles James Fox were “unlikely to receive obstruction from Perdita, who foresees that he will never be able to forward her views at court.”⁸⁶ Another story, a year and a half later, commented that, “The forlorn state of Perdita, who despite all reports to the contrary is indeed in a forlorn condition, strongly recommends the scripture advice of ‘put not your faith in princes.’”⁸⁷

Courtesans’ efforts to manage their public affairs occasionally drew a backlash from the press. Grace Dalrymple Eliot’s efforts to use the press to regain her popularity after being discarded publicly by a high-profile lover were mocked in a satirical ‘letter to the editor,’ which claimed, “I am a ruined man! For this year and a half I have been a domestic puff to Dally [Grace Eliot]...my case is irreparable as I am left with a quantity of *Dally puffs* on my hands, as good as new, but of little use.”⁸⁸ Robinson, who had most obviously sought to use the press for her own ends, was explicitly reprimanded by the press for exaggerating her conquests: “Mrs. R[obinson], celebrated for connubial ingratitude and folly, is now become a *puff prostitute*. This frail wanton has been puffed *in* and puffed *out* of the arms of the *heir apparent*, puffed *in* and puffed *out* of the arms of

⁸⁵ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, August 3, 1781. Burney Collection.

⁸⁶ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, vol 2: 39. Burney Collection.

⁸⁷ *Morning Herald*, August 17, 1785. Burney Collection.

⁸⁸ *Morning Herald*, September 24, 1781. Burney Collection.

the *Comte Artois*, but let her recollect *Time* will...at last give her an unerring puff into the arms of the *Grim King of Terror!*”⁸⁹

“Active Virtue” in the Early-Nineteenth Century

By the end of the eighteenth century, the narrative of aristocratic libertinage had been almost entirely extinguished by the advance of middle-class values. Where scandalized, but approving press coverage of aristocratic women’s sexual adventuring had filled the papers of the 1770s, and minute coverage of celebrity courtesans the papers of the 1780s and 1790s, by the early-nineteenth century, virtually no vestiges of libertine license remained in popular print culture. In the contest for cultural hegemony between elite libertinism and bourgeois propriety that characterized the 1780s and 1790s, the bourgeoisie had scored a decisive victory. In the last years of the eighteenth century, almost any mention of courtesans disappears. As the celebrity courtesans of the 1780s retired, no one took their place. A piece in the *Morning Herald* in February 1789 commented on this, noting that there was “no Perdita aspiring to the Queenship of Impurity...No Dame of Quality rendering nobility infamous.”⁹⁰ The only discussion of sexual misconduct came in the form of coverage of sensational trials for criminal conversation [adultery] or divorce, and even these drew complaints from readers that “the manner in which the accounts of infidelity are communicated to the world, certainly tends to promote the very evil it ought to correct. Could something not be done to prevent this prostitution of the press?”⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Morning Herald*, August 25, 1781. Burney Collection.

⁹⁰ *Morning Herald*, February, 11, 1789. Burney Collection.

⁹¹ *Morning Herald*, August 1, 1797. Burney Collection.

Moving into the nineteenth century, the narrative of middle-class values intensified. Having largely dispensed with at least the public embrace of the libertine narrative, the popular press sought to expand and intensify the parameters of the middle-class discourse spreading through society. They were no longer content to simply present a counter-narrative. Using moralistic essays, letters to the editor, and editorials, the urban bourgeoisie sought to reshape society into their image. In 1798, *The Times of London* began an essay series called *The Moralist*. Appearing once a week, the series condemned the “luxury and prodigality of the age,” and advanced a far more proscribed version of acceptable female behavior than had previously been disseminated. In a clear embrace of the growing separate spheres ideology, *The Moralist*’s February 1, 1798 column notes that, “a passionate women’s happiness is never in her own hands...it is in the sport of accident and the happenstance of events,” and advises women to instead, “cultivate a meek and gentle temper...which will make them beloved and happy.” Explaining that a “truly meek spirit will not look abroad for felicity, because it finds a constant banquet at home,” it encourages women to “endeavor to excel in those amusements of which he [her husband] most approves.”⁹² A letter to the editor printed in the *Morning Chronicle* in July 1803 furthers that construction by lamenting, “How does the least indiscretion sully the reputation, and plant sorrows in the soul that Time cannot obliterate.” An editorial in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1804 comments that perhaps it is “not to be wondered at that men grow rude and disrespectful,” when fashions (“arms bared nearly to the shoulder”), bold conversation (“the impudent leer, the pert wit, the silly double entendre”), and the coverage of “disgusting trials for conjugal infidelity...sicken men of sense and worth.”⁹³

⁹² *The Times*, February 1, 1798. Burney Collection.

⁹³ *The Times*, February 26, 1798. Burney Collection.

This narrow, middle-class construction of women also appeared in nineteenth-century iterations of the libertine press. A number of publishers attempted to revive *The Rambler's Magazine* that had been discontinued in 1786, all professing their intention of following in the original's footsteps.⁹⁴ However, the popular discourse of acceptable femininity had changed so completely, that an actual revival was impossible. The *Covent Garden Magazine* of the 1770s had applauded 'female libertinage'—not simply sexual misconduct, but female sexuality and female assertiveness. Despite the growing imposition of middle-class notions of propriety, *The Rambler's Magazine* of the 1780s had also accepted female sexuality and female assertiveness. By the 1820s, the construction of acceptable femininity had been completely redrawn to eliminate both. Informed by bourgeois ideals of domesticity and gentility, the popular public sphere had embraced a new construction of proper womanhood as passive, domestic, and non-sexual that made a true revival of the mid-eighteenth century libertine press impossible.

Like the late-eighteenth-century version, the nineteenth-century versions present an odd combination of content—serialized erotica and coverage of trials involving sexual misconduct, alongside moralistic essays and letters to the editor. One significant change between the eighteenth and nineteenth-century iterations is an explicit class message. The *Covent Garden Journal* covered aristocratic vice extensively, but mostly approvingly. Earlier iterations of *The Rambler's Magazine* echoed the splintered nature of societal discourses of the mainstream press, with approval of aristocratic libertinage appearing alongside condemnatory rhetoric of middle-class propriety. By the 1820s, the bourgeois

⁹⁴ Press runs were short and publishers virtually impossible to identify. However, Henry Spencer Ashbee's *Bibliography of Forbidden Books* notes new editions in 1822, 1824, 1827, and 1829.

cultural discourse had been completely absorbed into the popular public sphere, bringing with it a fully developed sense of class-consciousness.

Both the 1822 edition and the 1824 edition of *The Rambler* espouse a virulent anti-aristocratic tone. Much like the rhetoric of the 1770s that weighted aristocratic hypocrisy as worse than sexual misconduct, the nineteenth-century *Rambler* professes itself opposed to hypocrisy, rather than aristocracy, but the actual content does not bear that out. An editorial in the April 1822 issue asserts that, “If we search for examples of virtue, of prudence, or of propriety, we must not mingle with the great, but retire to the haunts of the less ostentatious. . . . The means and opportunities of the rich drive them to all kinds of dissipation.”⁹⁵ A letter to the editor published in June 1822, echoes that sentiment, commenting that “the nobility, at this period, is but a degenerated race of men. . . dissolved into every abject degree of contempt, dullness, effeminacy, and disease.” The women of the nobility “debauch themselves and their inferiors. . . and set their very sons the first examples of lewdness and debauchery.”⁹⁶

This attitude is clear even in the erotic stories they choose publish, such as “The Adulteress, or a late fashionable instance of infidelity” in July 1824. The piece is anti-aristocratic misogyny embedded into erotica. But even then, it seems to occasionally forget that it is supposed to be erotica, commenting at one point that, “Where prostitutes are the idols of society and the objects of universal adulation; when the matron is out-rivalled by the mistress, what are the rewards of conjugal fidelity?”⁹⁷ This misogyny is primarily aimed at women of the nobility and elite courtesans, as evidenced in the shift in tone in the June 1822 coverage of a trial for criminal conversation. The trial turned on the

⁹⁵ *The Rambler's Magazine*, April, 1822, 195.

⁹⁶ *The Rambler's Magazine*, June, 1822, 241.

⁹⁷ *The Rambler's Magazine*, July, 1824, 92.

testimony of a middle-class wife who had been seduced by a member of the nobility. The story describes her as an “unfortunate young girl...who appeared to be in the last stages of a decline, pale, emaciated, and broken-hearted.” It castigates the “the most villainous nature” of the defense as “an endeavor to slander a girl who was going broken-hearted to the grave for a dereliction of virtue,” and who should have been able to depend “upon the promises of a man by far her superior in rank and education.”⁹⁸

By the 1827 iteration, even *The Rambler's Magazine* had fully adopted bourgeois social values. The preface to the new edition noted that, “It is now fifty years since the ‘Old Rambler’ ended its amorous career...[after it] degenerated into that obscenity and political impropriety that made it the *ne plus ultra* of that dissolute society.” The publisher proposes, “Keeping all the wit, humor, spirit, gallantry, and intrigue...but avoiding its indecencies. We will not give cause for the severest moralist to censure or the most sensitive female to blush.” Despite these assertions, many of stories and biographies are quite ribald, though this version of magazine does seem to have reached back to the mid-eighteenth century in some senses. The content is more focused on erotica and includes considerably less political invective and anti-aristocratic vitriol. Though the rhetoric has been softened considerably, however, same bourgeois gender and class constructions are present. Instead of Cyprian Intelligence, which covered elite courtesans and their aristocratic lovers, they have Saloon Voluptuaries, which included mid-level prostitutes rather than elite courtesans, most of whom come to a bad end. Letters to the editor, while less virulent, focus on middle-class issues and values, such as one published in January from a number of “good natured girls” complaining about

⁹⁸ *The Rambler's Magazine*, June, 1822, 260.

“oppressive usage” at the hands of the magistrates, and asking for treatment “consonant with the boasted freedoms of the British Constitution.”⁹⁹

Court coverage also echoed middle-class constructions and interests. The February 1827 edition includes both coverage and commentary on a divorce trial in which the wife is suing for damages because her husband has not slept with her for six months. Earlier incarnations of the libertine press had included numerous stories—gossip, trial coverage, editorials—that addressed the issues of marriage and female sexuality. The February 1775 issue of the *Covent Garden Magazine* professed themselves fully in support of abandoned wives, warning that, “If husbands will not be husbands, they must take the consequences.”¹⁰⁰ *The Rambler’s Magazine* espoused a similar attitude in March 1783, noting that, “A sailor who marries deserves to be a cuckold; for while an admiral is at sea, the frigate at home must be manned.”¹⁰¹ 1827’s *Rambler*, however argued that, “Because a woman has been for 6 months bereft of conjugal rights, is no reason...that she should be authorized to rob her helpmate of his comforts—his gold—his silver—his precious stones more dear to a man...than his very existence.”¹⁰²

Mick Temple and Andrew Marr argue that across the nineteenth-century the press traded entertainment for respectability, and political rigor for a seat at the table.¹⁰³ Marr, especially, argues that the late-Victorian press was so compromised by bureaucracy and notions of respectability, that they became increasingly “‘lifeless’ and ‘mechanical.’”¹⁰⁴ While they are discussing the evolution of the press across the nineteenth century, that

⁹⁹ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, January, 1827, 93.

¹⁰⁰ *Covent Garden Magazine*, February, 1775, 37.

¹⁰¹ *The Rambler’s Magazine*, March, 1783, 105.

¹⁰² *The Rambler’s Magazine*, February, 1827, 45.

¹⁰³ Temple, *British Press*, 22; Andrew Marr, *My Trade: A Short History of British Journalism* (London: Pan Books, 2005), 78.

¹⁰⁴ Marr, *My Trade*, 77.

process towards respectability began in the eighteenth century. Ben Wilson attributes this process to the development of a ‘cult of civility’ in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Wilson argues that the growing formality and focus on respectability was a response to what the propriety-conscious middle class saw as the moral lassitude of the previous generation and to decades of anxiety, the two forces combining to place new emphasis on self-control and personal discipline. Wilson contends that the latter half of the eighteenth century saw a British population in a near constant state of anxiety, with political instability, economic turmoil, rapid social change, and the development of a commodity culture all contributing to fears of “national degeneracy.”¹⁰⁵ This widespread anxiety about the future of the country led to a new emphasis on morality and self-restraint, through which “domesticity and private habits became signifiers of a person’s worth.”¹⁰⁶

Wilson’s focus is broad societal trends rather than gender specifically, but his argument can easily be extended to address changing gender roles. Joan Wallach Scott has noted that insecure or newly established regimes often use restrictive policies towards women as an “assertion of control or strength.”¹⁰⁷ If we envision the rising middle class as a new *social* regime—eager to establish their authority, driven by anxiety, shaped by separate spheres ideology, and informed by rising evangelicalism—the sharpening rhetoric about female propriety takes on new significance. Wilson argues that widespread anxiety drove a “higher expectations of private reputation.”¹⁰⁸ Under this new middle-class social regime, those ‘higher expectations’ would fall disproportionately on women,

¹⁰⁵ Ben Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2007), 48.

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, *Victorian Values*, 329.

¹⁰⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1072.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, *Victorian Values*, 312.

placing their actions and behaviors under far stricter scrutiny, and over time become the prevailing social construct.

CHAPTER III:
“VICE RENDERED AMIABLE”:
COURTESAN MEMOIRS AND BOURGEOIS RESPECTABILITY

Elite courtesans' interactions with the daily press focused on immediacy. Maintaining status within elite circles meant remaining fashionable, and courtesans used the popular press to demonstrate their continued popularity by emphasizing their lovers' devotion, social status, and generosity, their own beauty and magnetism, and their lavish lifestyles. In producing memoirs, courtesans were addressing longer-term goals. Whether they sought to vindicate their own life choices, hold others accountable for past actions, or simply raise money, memoirs allowed courtesans to present a specific persona, one deliberately crafted to appeal to a wider audience and achieve specific goals.

While the slow progression of the cultural contest played out in the popular press demonstrates the gradual nature of societal change across the latter decades of the eighteenth century, courtesan memoirs taken from either side of that cultural transformation illustrate the full scope of those changes. They also reveal the active role courtesans played shaping their public images, demonstrating how they manipulated the language of the changing discourses to situate their life stories within the contemporary constructions of acceptable femininity. For late-eighteenth century courtesans, that meant

appropriating the ‘seduction narrative’ to highlight their lack of culpability in entering the world of gallantry, while also embracing the relatively open acknowledgement of sexual matters that characterized the elite libertine cultural narrative. For nineteenth-century courtesans, that meant using the contemporary discourses of domesticity and passivity to craft a non-threatening public image, but enough wit to maintain status and marketability.

Just as eighteenth-century courtesans had a more complicated relationship with the daily press than their predecessors, nineteenth-century courtesans had a more complicated relationship with the popular public sphere as a whole. Nineteenth-century courtesans no longer had to manage their image in the popular press, as neither the mainstream press nor the libertine press acknowledged their existence. The growing embrace of separate spheres and bourgeois ideology combined to increasingly label virtually any woman in the public sphere suspect, at the very least. As women were increasingly associated with the ‘private’ or domestic sphere, any movement into the public sphere became increasingly problematic. If a virtuous woman was content to remain in the domestic sphere, then any woman who fails to do so, must, by definition, lack virtue. Caroline Gonda argues that for women in the nineteenth century, “visibility and scandal” came to be virtually interchangeable.¹ Attacks on women in the public sphere were further complicated by the growing insistence on female passivity. For a woman in the public sphere to be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as attempting to assert control over her public image was to invite even further calumny.² The combination of these factors dissuaded most courtesans, or other ‘improper’ women, from publishing

¹ Caroline Gonda, "Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: Women in the Public Eye," in *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.

² Gonda, "Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens," 68.

their life-stories. As a result, despite any number of extremely successful courtesans, few published their life stories.

As bourgeois ideals of respectability and gentility spread through society, increasingly polarized constructions of masculinity and femininity redefined what men should want in women, thereby changing what made women desirable.³ As this new ideal of feminine allure spread through society, courtesans responded by embracing the image of respectability, if not the reality—“blurring of the boundaries between the sexually transgressive and the sexually respectable,” and mimicking virtue while remaining a sexual commodity.⁴ Late-eighteenth century autobiographies written by courtesans Ann Sheldon and Margaret Leeson, illustrate the societal and cultural norms as they existed before the ascendancy of the new middle-class ideals. The nineteenth-century works, written in conversation, are uniquely suited to demonstrate the extent to which the language of the middle class discourse had gained dominance. Courtesans Harriette Wilson and Julia Johnstone, who began as friends and ended as rivals, use their respective autobiographies to disparage the other’s reputation as much as to polish their own. To that end, they manipulate the new language of femininity, emotion, and separate spheres to craft personas that reflect those new values, for good or bad.

Despite being written on opposites ends of a significant cultural shift, there are notable similarities among the works. All four women claim a degree of moral superiority based on honesty and integrity rather than sexual purity. In addition, all four castigate society for a sexual double standard that allows men, in the words of Julia Johnstone, to “commit a hundred deviations from the path of rectitude... [and] gain an éclat by his

³ Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds. *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality* (London and New York: Methuen & Co, 1987), 2.

⁴ Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 96.

failings...and make him envied, instead of pitied or despised.”⁵ All four also emphasize that virtue and the loss of sexual purity were not mutually exclusive. As Harriette Wilson scathingly remarks, “there are but two classes of women...she is a bad woman, the moment she has committed fornication, be she charitable, just, clever, domestic, affectionate...still her rank in society, is with the lowest hired prostitute...while all are virtuous who are chaste.”⁶

Despite the similarities, these works are specific in time, and clearly reflect the culture that produced them. Read in concert, the differences between the eighteenth-century works of Ann Sheldon and Margaret Leeson, and the nineteenth-century works of Harriette Wilson and Julia Johnstone exemplify the changes in the larger cultural norms of each period.

Eighteenth-Century Courtesanship

The latter half of the eighteenth century was the golden age of courtesans in England. Supported by a burgeoning economy and given free reign by the liberal moral standards of the aristocracy, the discourse of libertine values shaped English social and cultural life. The anonymous author of 1779’s *Nocturnal Revels: or The History of King’s Place and Other Modern Nunneries* began his work by mocking the previous generation for its prudish morality, noting that they were so “unenlightened, so unpolished...they thought it infamous in any man...to keep a mistress.”⁷ He also professed himself astonished at the expectation that “a state of perfect celibacy should ever precede the

⁵ Julia Johnstone, *Confessions of Julia Johnstone*, ed. Julia Peakman, vol. 8 of *Whore Biographies, 1700-1825* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 52.

⁶ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 231.

⁷ *Nocturnal Revels: or, The History of King's-Place, and Other Modern Nunneries...* (London: Printed for M. Goadby, 1779), 5.

matrimonial vow,” announcing, quite smugly, that, “It is the present reign in which *Gallantry* has attained its summit, and *Intrigue* may now be pronounced at its zenith.”⁸

Elite prostitution was a vital and visible part of this world. The elite courtesans, the ‘Cyprian Corps,’ were the ‘it girls’ of the day. The press reported on their homes and carriages, quips and lovers, jewels, wardrobes, and hairstyles. Their portraits were reprinted in pamphlets and playbills. Gentlemen’s clubs published private directories that featured each woman’s appearance, personality, price, and specialties. They were constantly besieged by would-be lovers, and selected their protectors from among peers and princes. Having the right mistress was as much a part of a man’s image as wearing the right clothes or owning a home in the right part of town—and often just as visible. When the Duke of Clarence was pursuing the actress and courtesan Dorothy Jordan, the negotiations were reported regularly in the *Morning Post*.⁹

Courtesans at this level earned enormous sums. One writer estimates the average expenses of an elite courtesan at £3,000 a year—this during a period when a skilled artisan might earn £1 a week.¹⁰ Despite their lavish incomes, however, most courtesans fell into poverty after their popularity waned. By the late-eighteenth century, one accepted way for an aging courtesan to finance her retirement was to publish her memoirs—and if former lovers offered a financial incentive for better coverage, so much the better. Ann Sheldon and Margaret Leeson, writing in 1787 and 1792 respectively, were part of this world, and though both women recount—sometimes gleefully—their lives and adventures, they both ultimately claim to be writing to prevent other young

⁸ *Nocturnal Revels*, 6.

⁹ Venetia Murray, *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 135.

¹⁰ I. M. Davis, *The Harlot and the Statesman* (Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: The Kensal Press, 1986), vii.

women from making the same mistakes. Sheldon professes her desire to save “the inexperienced beauty, about to yield to the arts that beset her,” and Leeson to “caution others against falling into the like.”¹¹

Margaret Leeson, also known as Peg Plunkett, was born into a middle-class family in Ireland. While still a teenager, her father turned control of family affairs over to Leeson’s brother, who refused to allow her to marry in order to maintain control of her dowry. While staying with a married sister, Leeson was seduced by a family friend. Upon discovering her ‘slip,’ her family disowned her and upon discovering her pregnancy, her lover deserted her. With few options and no money, she slid into prostitution from financial necessity, accepting ‘protection’ from a local merchant. Leeson had a long, successful career. While she spent time in London, the bulk of her career played out in Dublin, where she was unquestionably the leading courtesan of the day. She owned the most exclusive brothel in Dublin catering to the aristocracy and wealthy merchants. She took lovers for enjoyment as much as for money, and was a vital part of Dublin’s civic and business communities.¹²

Ann Sheldon, in contrast, does not seem to have existed except for her autobiography. She was an actress and minor courtesan, who fell on hard times and took advantage of the public fascination with courtesans to finance her retirement. The only version of her story is the one she tells in her autobiography. She was born into a solid middle-class family, her father a ship-builder who was often away from home. As a teenager, she was sent to stay with family near London, and was subsequently lured into London by a manipulative procuress. She was eventually raped by a business associate of

¹¹ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 1:4; Margaret Leeson, *Memoirs of Mrs. Margaret Leeson*, ed. Julie Peakman, vol. 6 of *Whore Biographies, 1700-1825* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 10.

¹² Leeson, *Memoirs*, 1-3.

the procuress, and subsequently accepted ‘protection’ from an army lieutenant with Court connections. Throughout her autobiography, she gives a clear picture of the advantages, as well as the dangers, of life in the world of elite prostitution.¹³

In addressing their entry into prostitution, both Leeson and Sheldon take advantage of the seduction narrative to justify their actions and avoid culpability. One central feature of the seduction narrative is that the step into corruption has to be voluntarily taken. Thus, rape, betrayal, or manipulation does not lead to corruption in and of itself. It is the next step, taken consciously, that leads to corruption, and both women clearly portray the difference between their initial ‘fall’—rape in Sheldon’s case, and betrayal in Leeson’s—and their later, conscious steps into the world of prostitution.¹⁴ Leeson notes that in accepting her first protector, she was “taking a second and similar step to that which had caused all my distress, and that I was about to plunge deeper in vice.”¹⁵

Sheldon’s narrative marks a similar conscious choice to reject the world of propriety. Her first lover installed her in a private home and seemed to be offering her a chance at some degree of normalcy, telling her to “enquire after some steady, prudent genteel person as a companion, who might teach me marketing, and the economy of housekeeping.” Instead, she hired a woman “well acquainted with the world of gallantry, and profoundly skilled in the knowledge of elegant life.”¹⁶ Her rejection of the domestic life of marketing and household economy is an implicit rejection of all that that life embodies, and signifies her movement into the ‘elegant world.’

¹³ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 1:1-5.

¹⁴ Binhammer, “The Whore’s Love,” 512.

¹⁵ Leeson, *Memoirs*, 33.

¹⁶ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 1:181.

By relying on this traditional narrative, both women are placing themselves at the center of mid-eighteenth century construction of prostitution which was moving from the classic picture of the ‘libertine whore,’ to the more sympathetic image of the ‘fallen angel.’ Prostitutes were increasingly seen as victims—victims of upper-class men, victim of scheming procuresses, victims of their own emotional and sexual natures.¹⁷

London’s sex industry was flourishing in the late-eighteenth century. Exclusive brothels that catered to the elite were regularly reported on in the mainstream press. Publicly celebrated for the sophistication of their residents, they often served as finishing schools, recruiting beautiful, but unrefined girls to polish and present later as ‘novitiates.’¹⁸ The furnishings and fittings rivaled the most aristocratic homes. They served only the finest food and spirits, accepted only the most elite clientele, and catered to almost any whim a client might have. Both Sheldon and Leeson situate their narratives within this larger sex industry, and openly discuss brothels as simply part of their world, as well as some of the odder incidents they encountered during their careers.

Writing in 1787, Sheldon is open about the financial nature of her relationships. She describes parting from one lover with “mutual regret, as he was not yet satiated with my person, nor was I tired of his generosity.”¹⁹ In another instance, she recounts the beginning a relationship with a young baronet, explaining, “he was very fond, and I was not coy...[and] very soon he became a profitable votary to my shrine.”²⁰ She also recounts business dealings with two of the most celebrated brothel-owners in London—Charlotte Hayes and Mrs. Goadby—cheerfully describing how Mrs. Goadby invited her

¹⁷ Binhammer, “The Whore’s Love,” 520.

¹⁸ Davis, *The Harlot and the Statesman*, 13.

¹⁹ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 1:233.

²⁰ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 1:235.

to “occasionally see visitors” at her ‘nunnery,’ and how subsequently, “riches poured in upon me.”²¹

Margaret Leeson, who owned an elite brothel in Dublin in the 1780s, told similar stories of her clients. She recounts the story of one who wanted to practice boxing naked—and got so carried away he nearly burned down her house—, and another who kept a mistress for years but never touched her except to wash her feet.²² In another episode, she subtly mocked conventions of modesty by attending a masquerade ball dressed as “the Goddess of Chastity, Diana huntress of the woods...for had I appeared in the character of Cleopatra, Messalina... it surely could not be deemed...to be an *assumed character*.”²³ While these stories are told without any vulgarity or salacious detail, they would nevertheless be unthinkable by the early nineteenth century. The middle-class discourse of respectability and changing perception of female sexuality would combine to drive any acknowledgement of sexuality underground.

During the eighteenth century, marriage, especially at the elite level, was rarely for love. The anonymous author of *Nocturnal Revels* notes that, “A man’s honor will be called into question who lets pass unnoticed his mistress’s inconstancy,” while he “politely winks at his wife’s amours.”²⁴ This attitude toward marriage is clear in both eighteenth-century autobiographies. Leeson comments that when she “entertain[ed] a married man in my house...I always took care that they should meddle with no lady, if I could help it, who was not perfectly safe.”²⁵ By ‘safe,’ she means free from venereal disease. For a married man to visit a brothel was acceptable, so long as he did not carry

²¹ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 1: 248.

²² Leeson, *Memoirs*, 141, 164.

²³ Leeson, *Memoirs*, 143.

²⁴ *Nocturnal Revels*, 6-7.

²⁵ Leeson, *Memoirs*, 170

venereal disease home to his wife. Ann Sheldon's narrative demonstrates a similarly cavalier attitude towards marriage, becoming annoyed with one lover for his "melancholy air." She notes that while "it is true that the Lady Bateman [her lover's wife] died about this time...as his lordship was a gainer of, at least, two thousand pounds a year by the event, I shall not flatter his sensibility so much as to imagine that her death produced anything like a melancholy idea in his mind."²⁶

The most radical change that will come with the dominance of the middle-class discourse is the acceptance of separate spheres ideology, and women's removal from the public sphere of business and commerce and their relegation to the private sphere of the home. While middle-class wives in the nineteenth century might wield some degree of influence in the public sphere, that influence was "essentially private and always indirect."²⁷ In the eighteenth century, while women were responsible for the home and family, it was not to the exclusion of all other activity. Leeson and Sheldon both present themselves as competently pursuing their own interests from what historian Laura Rosenthal calls a "masculine position of self-ownership."²⁸

Leeson, writing in 1797, was directly involved in civic life. She used the court system to take action against people who had wronged her: in one case, suing a group of young men for damages that had vandalized her home, in another charging the owner of an opera house who with assault for having her physically removed from the premises. She maintained strong relationships with the local merchants and police, ran her own business successfully, and even oversaw the construction of her home. She was such a

²⁶ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 2:55.

²⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 245.

²⁸ Laura J Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 10.

well-known figure in the business community, that when a rival charged her with assault, the jury decided in her favor, because “it would be a pity not to favour a woman who had been of considerable service to the traders of this city.”²⁹

Though she did not have the high public profile of Leeson, Sheldon also openly discussed her business dealings in her autobiography. She skillfully negotiated with would-be protectors, and showed no hesitation in rejecting offers that failed to meet her standards. At other times, she recognized when she had little room to negotiate, and accepted the outcome, even if it was not to her advantage. At one point, she discovered an acquaintance was trying to cheat her, but decided to allow it because, “It would not have been in my interest, at that time.”³⁰ She also supports local merchants who might prove useful later, and uses the court system when necessary to protect her interests. Sheldon and Leeson both participated fully in the public sphere, and both incorporate that role in the wider community in their autobiographies. In the nineteenth century, Wilson and Johnstone will both work to obscure their own participation in the public sphere to conform to the changing construction of femininity that emphasizes women’s domestic role.

Sheldon and Leeson’s autobiographies clearly reflect the cultural mores of the eighteenth century. Gender roles were far less distinct, and sexual mores were far more lax than they would be just thirty years later. Both women take advantage of the dominant discourses of the time to justify their actions and position themselves within the larger culture. The growing dominance of separate spheres ideology and the middle-class discourses of domesticity and respectability would combine to change that culture materially. Where Leeson proudly detailed her participation in the public sphere, and

²⁹ Leeson, *Memoirs*, 70.

³⁰ Sheldon, *Memoirs*, 2:39.

Sheldon matter-of-factly accepted her role in the wider sex industry, Wilson and Johnstone will focus attention on their domesticity and downplay the commercial nature of their relationships to better comply with the new constructions of femininity.

Nineteenth-Century Courtesanship

In 1812, when Napoleon referred to Britain as a “nation of shopkeepers,” he most likely did not mean it as a compliment.³¹ Writing in 1838, however, Sarah Stickney Ellis adopts the phrase to justify the dominance of middle-class culture, noting that it is “shopkeepers...the middle class, [that] must include so vast a portion of the intelligence and moral power of the country at large, that it may not improperly be designated the pillar of our nation’s strength.”³² By the early nineteenth century, English society had largely absorbed the middle-class discourses of respectability and domesticity, and new constructions of both masculinity and femininity affected all levels of society. Aristocratic sexual license and conspicuous consumption were slowly being replaced by middle-class prudence and self-control.

The progressive moralism of the early-nineteenth century required the world of gallantry to adopt an ever-greater degree of discretion. Despite the public face of moral improvement in elite circles, contemporary observers debated the reality of that transformation. One magazine declared, “The days of Lovelaces and Lotharios are past,” while another claimed that “‘barefaced profligacy’ [was] still ‘flaunted in defiance of a better sense of feeling.’”³³ Historian Michael Mason argues that while aristocratic

³¹ Stephen Englund, *Napoleon: A Political Life* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 367.

³² Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Prose Works of Mrs. Ellis* (New York: Henry S. Langley, 1844), 6.

³³ Mason, *Victorian Sexuality*, 110-112.

libertinism did not disappear, it was “perhaps tinged with a more decorous and controlled idea of sexual license” than fifty years earlier.³⁴

The elite ‘nunneries’ of the previous era had been replaced by private brothels where two or three lesser courtesans would live together and receive ‘visitors.’ Elite courtesans had become “*demi-reps*” who existed independently of publicly acknowledged lovers, though they were still very much in the public eye.³⁵ While eighteenth-century courtesans were covered in the press, nineteenth-century courtesans were most visible in the theater. A private box at the theater or the opera served as a stage-cum-storefront in an arena where the onstage performance was merely a distraction from the real show taking place in the audience.³⁶ Courtesans openly held court, and their respective rank within the fashionable world could be ascertained by noting the social caliber or wealth of their male visitors. Ironically, despite the increasing emphasis placed on companionate marriage, these men often paid their respects to fashionable courtesans in full view of their wives, seated in *their* boxes on the other side of the theatre.

For elite courtesans in the nineteenth century, creating and maintaining a successful public image required a very delicate balancing act, between the growing hegemony of the middle-class discourses and values and aristocratic sophistication and license. The changing constructions of femininity emanating from the middle class had penetrated the upper class to some degree, but aristocratic notions of desirability still differed significantly from middle-class sensibilities. As elite courtesans drew the majority of their clients from the aristocracy or, at the very least, non-aristocrats associated with Court circles, being perceived as *too* middle-class could significantly

³⁴ Mason, *Victorian Sexuality*, 110.

³⁵ Wilson, *Victorian Values*, 191.

³⁶ Wilson, *Victorian Values*, 197.

damage both social status and financial prospects. However, as writers hoping for book sales, they needed to reach a wider audience than aristocratic men. In order to negotiate between these competing demands, Wilson and Johnstone both emphasized their own compliance with contemporary gender roles and the other's rejection of them.

The autobiographies of Harriette Wilson and Julia Johnstone, both published in 1825, differ substantially from the earlier works in tone, in character, and in constructions of masculinity and femininity, demonstrating the changes in the dominant discourse over the course of forty years. Wilson and Johnstone were leading courtesans in early-nineteenth century London. They met at the beginning of their careers, and remained friends for years. Together they dominated the world of the *demi-monde*. They shared a home, entertained and travelled together, and counseled each other on lovers and settlements. By 1825, however, when their respective autobiographies were published, they had become bitter enemies, and that enmity is reflected in their works—even in the title of Johnstone's work, *Confessions of Julia Johnstone, in Contradiction to the Fables of Harriette Wilson*.

Harriette Wilson was born into a middle-class family with fifteen children. Her father was a violent man, often beating Wilson and her sisters, and his marriage to Wilson's mother was not a happy one. Wilson was sent away to a convent school in France, returning only to find that two of her sisters, Amy and Fanny, had left home to become mistresses of local merchants.³⁷ Shortly thereafter, Wilson herself left home to

³⁷ Harriette Wilson, *Clara Gazul: or Honi Soit qui Mal y Pense* (New York: S & D.A. Forbes, Printers, 1830), v-xx. Google ebooks.

become the mistress of the Earl of Craven.³⁸ Wilson later moved to London, as did her sisters, and, together with Johnstone, become the center of the ‘elegant world.’

Julia Johnstone was born into a family with aristocratic ties and connections at Court. At fourteen, she was sent to live with friends of the family. At sixteen, she was seduced by the man with whose family she was living. After their affair was discovered, he installed her in a house in a good neighborhood and continued the relationship until Johnstone’s mid-twenties, during which time they had five children. When her lover broke off their affair, Johnstone moved in with Wilson and entered, really for the first time, the *demi-monde*.³⁹

Wilson’s autobiography is a complicated work. In the preface, she openly acknowledges writing out of spite and financial need. It was also an open secret that she was writing for blackmail and that former lovers could buy their way out of her memoirs for the right price—a fact subtly acknowledged at the end of each weekly installment in the list of the men to be featured the next week. In March 1825, *The Times of London* published a letter purportedly from Wilson to a former lover, boasting, “People are buying themselves so fast out of my book” and warning that “I have no time to write again...what with writing books, and then altering them for those who *buy out*.”⁴⁰ Wilson openly acknowledges it herself in the last volume of her *Memoirs*, lamenting, “It would have been much more witty and amusing, had not the best of the wit been bought out at so much a line.”⁴¹ The blatant avarice of her unstated motives, in combination with her stated motive of spite, makes her *Memoirs* difficult to take at face value.

³⁸ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 13.

³⁹ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 1-3.

⁴⁰ “Memoirs of Harriette Wilson,” *The Times of London*, March 14, 1825.

⁴¹ Harriette Wilson, *Memoirs of Harriette Wilson* (London: J. J. Stockdale, 1827), 5: 242.

Wilson skillfully manipulated the language of the new constructions of femininity to create a non-threatening, and far more appealing, characterization of herself in her narrative than that of her actual persona. In her *Memoirs*, Wilson consistently emphasizes her lack of avarice, instead claiming that there is “a providence, which is kind enough to take particular care of me.”⁴² She also repeatedly underscores her lack of artifice. When her sister advises her to lie to a lover, she claimed, “it really is so little in my nature, that it is scarcely in my power, to be artful.” In another instance, she comments, “I am not a coquette, like you, and it fatigues me to death to be eternally making myself agreeable.”⁴³ By underlining her lack of interest in financial matters and her lack of duplicity, Wilson was directly contradicting the public scandal surrounding her memoirs, as well as constructing a version of herself that conformed far more closely to the contemporary construction of acceptable femininity than was actually the case.⁴⁴

Just as she utilized the new construction of gender roles to cast herself in a better light, she uses the same discourses to depict her rivals (sisters Amy, Fanny, and Sophia and Julia Johnstone) as negatively as possible. When discussing her own relationships, Wilson emphasized their romantic or emotional nature, thus portraying herself as properly feminine. In contrast, she depicts her rivals’ relationships as blatantly mercenary, and therefore ‘unwomanly.’ In one scene, she recounts her sister Amy’s thought process in deciding between two possible lovers to emphasize the commercial nature of the relationship: “I want two hundred pounds directly. It spoils all one’s

⁴² Wilson, *Memoirs*, 157.

⁴³ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 325, 47.

⁴⁴ “Memoirs of Harriette Wilson,” Bell’s Life in London, February 25, March 6, 1825.

independence to ask an Englishman for money...Palmella wishes to have me altogether under his protection. He is rich, but—I like Col. Sydenham best.”⁴⁵

Johnstone’s *Confessions* are equally problematic. While she did not blackmail former lovers, she was nevertheless writing for money. In addition, she acknowledges in the preface that she is writing in rebuttal to Wilson’s *Memoirs*, and this sense of rivalry between the two women infuses the entire work. Johnstone’s *Confessions* consistently draws a sharp line between herself and Wilson, crafting her own persona as quiet, domestic, and properly feminine, and Wilson as public, profligate, and overtly sexual. Johnstone positions herself as closely as possible to a virtuous middle-class matron, in spite of her chosen profession, saying, “I am not setting myself up to be a paragon of virtue, at the best I was only a kept mistress, whose greatest merit was being constant to the man with whom I lived.”⁴⁶ In contrast to Julia’s own sterling character, Wilson was “all animal spirits” who “would descend to any degradation...to acquire money to lavish on her low paramours.”⁴⁷

In contrast to the eighteenth-century courtesans who openly participated in the public sphere, Johnstone and Wilson both emphasize their preference for domestic sphere, and their rival’s role in the public. Johnstone explained that her satisfaction came from “romping with my dear children,” while Wilson “longed for the publicity St. James’s Street affords, and the gaze of fools at an opera or play.”⁴⁸ At one point, she explicitly employs the trope of domesticity to underscore the difference between herself and Wilson, noting that “the trifling of a pretty woman is a very pleasing amusement,”

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 43.

⁴⁶ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 39.

⁴⁷ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 32.

⁴⁸ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 35, 136.

but a real woman's "sterling worth" comes when "the door is closed upon busy intruders...and the fireside is made the familiar resting place of body and mind."⁴⁹

Wilson highlights not just her virtuous nature, but her recognition of the importance of family in describing her relationship with one long-term lover, the Marquis of Worcester. Worcester was quite young when their relationship began, and he repeatedly offered to marry her over his family's objections. According to Wilson, she refused to marry him, "believing that such a marriage would distress your family." She did claim, nonetheless, that his family owed her a debt of gratitude as, "I have constantly refused to accept expensive presents from you, and I have saved you from gambling, and a hundred other vices and misfortunes." Wilson, like Johnstone, used society's new emphasis on domesticity to craft a less threatening and more traditional public image.

Closely related to the ideal of domesticity was the growing emphasis on the importance of companionate marriage. While marriage at the elite level was still largely a business arrangement, the ideal of companionate marriage had been firmly established among the middle class and played a significant part in the autobiographies of both Johnstone and Wilson. Wilson's first real love affair was with Lord Ponsonby, a married man twice her age. In her *Memoirs*, she asserts that at the beginning of their affair, she told him, "If ever our intimacy is discovered, so as to upset her peace of mind, on that day we must separate for ever." Throughout her narrative, she repeatedly returns to her involvement with him, lamenting, "For the crime of attaching myself to a married man, I have deeply suffered." Looking back, she professes herself, "astonished now at that infatuation, which could render me...thus thoughtless and careless of the fate of

⁴⁹ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 52.

another...a young, innocent, and lovely wife.”⁵⁰ Romantic or companionate marriage constituted a significant enough factor by the early-nineteenth century for Wilson to feel the need to excuse her relationship with a married man by expressing sympathy and solicitousness toward his wife’s feelings, in sharp contrast to the earlier works.

Johnstone places similar weight on the sanctity of marriage, insisting that her first lover “lived on the worst possible terms with his wife, and on that account saw but little company at home.”⁵¹ She further noted she “had ever considered and conducted myself as his wife, and within the very limited circle of his acquaintance, I had commanded that respect, few in my situation ever acquired.”⁵² By emphasizing her lover’s bad marriage and the esteem she received as his mistress, she highlighted the seriousness of her relationship, and her position within the bound of propriety, in contrast to her characterization of Wilson’s relationships as casual and mercenary, and Wilson herself as transgressive and dangerous.

Sheldon and Leeson, writing in the eighteenth century, were open about their role as courtesans and their position within the larger sex industry. Johnstone and Wilson, writing in the nineteenth century, make no acknowledgement whatsoever that such a thing even exists. The one time Wilson acknowledges prostitution explicitly, it is because she was horrified to find herself “in close contact with some females, whose language made [my] blood run cold,” exclaiming, “Dear me! Good gracious! We are in the lobby, with all the very worst women!”⁵³

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 78, 67, 92.

⁵¹ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 16.

⁵² Johnstone, *Confessions*, 54.

⁵³ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 283.

In addition to largely obscuring the commercial nature of their relationships, both women exploit the construct of female sexual passivity to their advantage, using the mere existence of sexual desire as weapon to disparage the other's character and its lack to burnish their own. Wilson only refers to sex in the most oblique terms as it applies to herself, saying of her first sexual encounter with a new lover that "morning blushed to find us in the arms of each other."⁵⁴ When discussing her rivals' sexual natures, however, she is far more direct. She chastises "weak, mistaken females... who, for the indulgence of mere animal-passion... can forsake her children, and forget the laws of God and man."⁵⁵ She comments that her sister Amy's "virtue was something like the nine lives of a cat," and accuses Johnstone as having "passions, like those of a man... violent and changeable."⁵⁶ Johnstone, in return, professes herself appalled by Wilson's sexual appetite, saying, "Her passions were as an impetuous torrent, which ...leaves ruin and desolation on every side."⁵⁷ Johnstone pronounces herself, in contrast, "indifferent to most men," though she "strove to conquer that indifference for the sake of my children," using her lack of sexual passion to underline her inherent feminine virtue⁵⁸

The easy acceptance of female sexuality in the earlier works reflect eighteenth century mores that, while still demanding sexual purity from some women, did accept that all women had a sexual nature—one often acknowledged as more powerful than a man's. By the time Wilson and Johnstone were writing in 1825, separate spheres ideology and middle-class ideals had combined to render female sexuality invisible or non-existent. This process would continue throughout the nineteenth century, culminating

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 30.

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 332.

⁵⁶ Wilson, *Memoirs*, 33, 60.

⁵⁷ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 32.

⁵⁸ Johnstone, *Confessions*, 127.

late in the century when female lack of sexual desire was such an accepted fact that the medical community considered women who did claim to have sexual feelings mentally unbalanced.⁵⁹

Between the late-eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the growing cultural hegemony of the middle class would substantially alter British society. As the 'middling sort' slowly transformed into the middle class, their values of self-control, moral rectitude, and respectability would assert dominance over society as a whole, reforming the lax sexual morals of the aristocracy and the raucous unpredictability of the working class. The new ideal of domesticity and the changing constructions of femininity redefined the parameters of women's lives, and forced compliance even from those far outside the middle class.

Courtesan autobiographies from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflect these changes in society as a whole, and in individual women's lives. Ann Sheldon and Margaret Leeson's autobiographies are clear expressions of the permissive culture in which they were written. They also attest to the wider world in which women operated during that era. Harriette Wilson and Julia Johnstone's autobiographies demonstrate the extent to which British culture changed in a relatively short period. Only a generation or two separate these women, yet the cultures they lived in were sharply different. Wilson and Johnstone's world required considerably more skill and discretion to navigate successfully. The boundaries between propriety and impropriety were sharper, and the consequences for transgressing those boundaries heavier. Their narratives demonstrate their ingenuity and skill at negotiating those boundaries through the adoption and manipulation of the language of the new discourses of femininity and domesticity.

⁵⁹ Cott, 235.

CHAPTER IV:

CONCLUSION

Architectural historian Jane Rendell uses Pierce Egan's *Life in London* series to explore many of the same concepts of gender and of competing cultural narratives as this project has. She argues that the stark differences in tone, language, and constructions of class and gender between 1821's original *Life In London*, and 1828's *Life in and Out of London* illustrate not merely societal changes—what Rendell calls, “The early stages of re-establishing a private mode of patriarchy”—but also a growing rejection of urban culture as a whole.¹ She notes that where the earlier work presented urban life as a never-ending banquet of wine, women, and song, the 1828 work makes explicit links between urban culture, dissipation, and disease or death. Rendell's focus on spatial dynamics lends itself to a discussion of the use of urban space, and therefore the urban-rural divide she sees in the evolution of *Life in London*.² However, that conclusion simplifies the cultural dynamics at play by imposing spatial narrative that overlooks the explicit warnings of the narratives of gender and class.

While the series finale does, clearly, embrace a simpler life, the life they are rejecting is libertine, not urban. In the earlier works, the urban sophisticates Corinthian

¹ Rendell, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 22.

² Rendell, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 126.

Tom, a nobleman, and Corinthian Kate, an elite courtesan, are glamorous, polished, aspirational figures. Their narrative in the early works is to introduce country cousin Jerry Hawthorne and student Bob Logic to, not just *Life in London*, but elite libertine life in London. The later works illustrate the rejection of libertine values and the triumph of middle-class respectability by depicting the elite figures of Tom and Kate as diseased, desperate, and debt-ridden, and the bourgeois figures of Jerry and Bob escaping a similar fate only by rejecting libertine values.³

One way in which Egan betrays his embrace of bourgeois values is in the specifics of how he depicts Corinthian Kate's downfall. As separate spheres ideology spread through society, female virtue was increasingly coded domestic. Over time, women who failed to stay within the domestic sphere were not just domestic, but also not virtuous and not feminine. In Egan's finale, *Life in and Out of London*, Corinthian Kate is depicted in increasingly public venues—from a private home paid for by her lover, to an elite brothel, to an 'assignation house,' and ultimately to the street.⁴ By linking Kate's increasing dissipation and disease with steady progress from the private to the public, Egan is advancing a very specific middle-class construction of femininity and directly confronting his earlier embrace of libertine culture.

The evolution of Egan's *Life in London* series illustrates the contesting discourses and their outcomes, but also the role of print culture in both placing those narratives before the public and in the resolution of the struggle for cultural dominance. While the license of libertine excess and hedonism had been largely displaced by middle-class

³ Pierce Egan and Robert Cruikshank, *Life in London: Or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq., and His Elegant Friend...* (1821; repr., London: Methuen & Co, 1904).; Pierce Egan and Robert Cruikshank, "Finish" of *Tom and Jerry: Being More Life In and Out of London* (London: J. Dicks, 18--). Both available from archive.org.

⁴ Rendell, *Pursuit of Pleasure*, 128-130.

propriety by the end of the eighteenth century, it did make a brief, partial revival centered around the Prince Regent early in the nineteenth century. The future George IV's drunken, dissolute, profligate lifestyle seemed ideal to spark a resurrection of libertine values, but the middle-class values of self-restraint, proper consumption, and respectability had penetrated too deeply into society. The increasingly authoritative public sphere rejected the Prince and his antics, using popular print culture to police social and cultural norms.⁵

A significant example of this rejection is the repeated failure of attempts to resurrect *The Rambler's Magazine* in the 1820s. Ambitious publishers saw the elite re-embracing libertine values, and sought to appeal to a specific market with a proven product. But just as attempts to resuscitate libertine culture failed, so did efforts to resuscitate the libertine press. The libertine discourse that had allowed and encouraged elite sexual license, ribald humor, and female libertinage had been so fully displaced by bourgeois respectability that not only was there not a public readership, but even the publishers themselves could not fully embody the attitudes of the previous generation.

We should be careful, though, not to assume too complete a reformation of manners among the elite. Harriette Wilson's *Memoirs* created such a scandal because the men she named had worked very hard to maintain public reputations to fit their public responsibilities. They had not ceased to misbehave, of course. They had simply learned to keep their affairs behind closed doors. Bob Harris notes that, "Politicians became increasingly aware of the public nature of their activities," but this awareness was not

⁵ For further reading on print culture and Regency politics, please see Saul David, *Prince of Pleasure: The Prince of Wales and the Making of the Regency* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998); Venetia Murray, *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England* (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

limited to politicians.⁶ The reformation of manners that had swept through society had also affected the aristocracy, to some extent. While privately they may not have fully embraced these values, they were very much aware of the importance of public perception. The awareness of public perception demonstrates the growing power of the popular public sphere. Habermas argued that once the civic public sphere became simply a ‘culture-consuming public,’ it ceased to wield any legitimate power. Habermas is certainly correct in the sense that the vast majority of people reading about Parliamentary debates or political scandals in the newspapers had no political voice at all. Their opinions should have had no impact on the actions of the elite. However, as part of an urban community, a popular public sphere, they were able to wield popular opinion and pass judgment on the elites through popular print culture.

The most enduring part of the discourse of middle-class values was the reconstruction of female propriety and the imposition of the ideology of separate spheres. Much like the covert indulgences of elite men, elite courtesans continued to exist, but adapted to the new reality of acceptable female behavior. A limited newspaper search for Mary Robinson’s nickname, *Perdita*, returned over 3,000 stories. Even allowing for only half of those stories to be relevant, this shows the prominent role of elite courtesans in the popular press of the late-eighteenth century. Catherine Walters, in contrast, the premier courtesan of the nineteenth century, appears in the popular press only three times, despite a career that lasted for thirty years.⁷

The social and cultural issues of the late-eighteenth century are still surprisingly relevant to today’s conversation about gender, about the power of the press, about the

⁶ Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press*, 77.

⁷ “A Demi-Monde Swell and Her Tailor,” *Reynolds's Newspaper*, May 11, 1873.; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, December 11, 1864; “Remarkable Divorce Case,” *Daily News*, November 1, 1890.

authority of popular opinion. And like today, in many cases the reality is less consequential than the rhetoric. Amanda Vickery and Linda Colley have argued that the explosion of didactic, prescriptive literature aimed at women argues for increasing female intrusion into the public sphere, rather than their compliant immuration in the domestic sphere.⁸ Focused research into eighteenth-century women's lives consistently reveals widely disparate experiences of women based on class, education, geography, and wealth. Middle-class and elite women remained active and engaged in the public sphere throughout the period, just as working-class women remained an integral, if unacknowledged, part of the public sphere as laborers and service providers.⁹ Despite this, the public narrative of women in public as dangerous and transgressive is what survives, and continues to influence the public discussion of gender, sexuality, and rights.

⁸ Vickery, "Golden Age or Separate Spheres," 407.; Colley, *Britons*, 238-50.

⁹ Vickery, "Golden Age or Separate Spheres," 400.

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Entertainment of the Polite World...*
*The Original Rambler's Magazine, or Annals of Gallantry, and amusing miscellany of
Fun, Frolic, Fashion, and Flash...*
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The Rambler, or The Fashionable Companion, being a complete Register of Gallantry
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