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Life as a 17th-Century Prostitute

*Free as light and air I walk,
And uncontroll'd my passions guide;
I eat and drink and sing and talk,
And something else I do beside;
Hither then, my followers come,
And, on the couch, the seat of bliss,
I'll strait conduct the hero home,
And shew you what this something is.¹*

2.1 Introduction – historical research on early modern prostitution

If we asked our readers to imagine a seventeenth-century prostitute, it is likely that some might picture a beautifully dressed and youthful courtesan, perhaps attending the playhouse with her wealthy lover but keeping a mindful watch for potential suitors. Others might visualize a wretched streetwalker, her appearance visibly marred by the tolls of venereal disease, alcoholism and physical abuse, attempting to interest a passer-by in a brief outdoor transaction. Both of these images do have their place in early modern England but they represent polar extremes of a profession that spanned a great range of social class and economic status and which women turned to for different reasons. We must resist viewing seventeenth-century sex workers as one homogenous group: each person had individual backgrounds, motivations and experiences of the sex trade. However, it would be wrong to suggest that early modern prostitutes were spread equally throughout the social strata of England in the period. As we will see, the driving force behind the vast majority of women selling their bodies was, and probably still is, poverty.

The seventeenth century was a period of revolution (both the English Civil War and the overthrow of James II in 1688 have been termed revolutions), dislocation and unremitting religious tension. It would have been almost impossible for people living in what we now call Britain to avoid the effects of such turmoil, no matter their social status, gender or age. Cities such as London struggled to cope with desperate and often unskilled migrants competing for the disproportionately small legitimate employment opportunities. There was already a rudimentary poor relief system in place at the beginning of the seventeenth century but eligibility was far from guaranteed and payments, when made, were usually insufficient to live upon. If a woman was single, childless and physically able to work, as many prostitutes were, local officials considered her responsible for her own economic well-being and were almost always unwilling to provide outdoor relief.

Prostitution, therefore, became a particularly viable choice for women who had few other options. In some cases, it provided a financial safety net for lower-class women during unstable periods of their lives – a temporary solution to bridge a gap between other jobs. Other women turned to prostitution in a full-time and professional capacity. Rubenhold (2005: 288) has noted that prostitution differed little from any lifestyle of underprivileged women at the time: ‘Women of this class, whose voices were unheard and who were virtually sidelined by society and the law, had little recourse in the tragedies that befell them.’ Severe social and economic disruption affected every class and, as a result, some prostitutes had relatively grand origins or reinvented themselves as paid mistresses simply because they believed it would allow them more social freedom than wifedom and motherhood.

Scholars interested in researching early modern prostitutes face similar problems as those who are trying to reconstruct the lives of any group which is overwhelmingly illiterate and politically disempowered. We will see in Chapter 3 that prostitutes were often referenced by contemporary male writers in a variety of genres but do the voices of these women ever reach us directly? A minority of seventeenth-century women were taught to read, no doubt to allow them the benefit of biblical study, but very few of these could write. There were proportionately more literate women living in seventeenth-century London than in rural areas: a quarter at the beginning of the century and, by the end, rising to nearly half.² Prostitutes, usually coming from the ranks of the lower classes, were mostly illiterate. Those women who had the ability to document their lives either failed to do so or suffered the fate of their manuscripts being considered insufficiently important to preserve.³ There are more surviving

documents written by women than one might expect but the vast majority of these is from the gentry class: from those who had the literary ability, motivation and leisure time to allow them to write alongside the status necessary to give their words even a chance of enduring. Historians' attempts to reconstruct the lives of women using these women's own voices have also been obstructed by contemporary male prejudice and interference. Samuel Pepys, for example, who went on to inform and delight future generations with diary accounts of his extramarital liaisons and drinking, ordered his wife to destroy her own memoir.⁴

It is not all bad news, however. Academics studying seventeenth-century prostitution are by no means bereft of evidence. While this century witnessed the burgeoning of a print culture, throughout the period a rich oral culture also persisted, traces of which were preserved. Hence, we can learn from gossip and insults, proverbs and folklore, street songs, ballads and charms, jokes and stories, including anecdotes, fairy tales and 'old wives' tales'. Mendelson and Crawford (1998: 58–64), for instance, have employed proverbs to illustrate commonplace seventeenth-century attitudes held by women and conceived to characterize women. Also important is the study of material objects such as everyday household items which can shed light on a woman's daily activities.⁵

While the possibility of studying prostitution in the past existed, prostitution, as a subject of scholarly study, was deemed distasteful well into the 1960s.⁶ In the following decades, partly as a result of the rise of feminist theory and a new interest in the lives of everyday people, attitudes changed. Attwood (2011: 8) has explained how, over the past thirty years, social historians have studied the social structure and organization of commercial sex while students from the fields of art history, literary scholarship and feminist theory have studied the representation and symbolic meaning of prostitution. Present-day historians usually accept that the prior omission of research into the lives of women created a serious imbalance in our understanding of the early modern world and appreciate that scholarship which focuses on prostitutes is one way of contributing towards our rewriting of the past. As Froide (2005: 221) has written, in understanding what seventeenth-century society regarded as marginal, we are much better placed to understand what was considered to be normal.

In Chapter 1, we discussed the potential shortcomings of conducting research into seventeenth-century prostitution solely using the Old Bailey Corpus. We would argue that drawing on a wide range of types of texts provides a more balanced picture of an historical group than would be achieved by looking at one type of text alone. But what relevant textual data may be available? Prior to the eighteenth century, when the crimes of whores were documented with

a new gusto, there were few official sources relating to prostitution other than secular and church court reports. There is an abundance of court records to investigate and their bulk might lead us to believe that we possess the necessary information to fully understand the circumstances of women who were brought before the law. These legal documents do sometimes provide us with very useful information on the circumstances and behaviour of sex workers, including where they were based and with whom they associated. However, information contained within early modern criminal records cannot truly illuminate the lives of seventeenth-century prostitutes for a number of reasons. Although the vast majority of records of indictments and recognizances survive, as we shall see, most women accused of being prostitutes were dealt with by more informal legal procedures which required less rigid record keeping. Most importantly, only a small percentage of women selling their bodies were actually caught and prosecuted. The women referenced in legal records represent only a very small portion of those who were regularly working as prostitutes.⁷

Those women prosecuted for prostitution or for being involved in the sex industry in another capacity were, at most, accused of committing a misdemeanour and were not tried by a jury or given the opportunity to speak in court. Criminal proceedings were recorded from the point of view of the authorities; it must be assumed that recorded testimonies were not verbatim transcripts as they were edited by court officials. First-hand accounts by convicted felons have survived by means of their biographers reproducing their testimonies, again probably edited, but prostitutes never look us square in the eyes and our best chances of reaching them come via their male contemporaries.⁸

In terms of archival sources, we must make the best of what we have been left and a number of historians have produced richly illuminating studies which are highly relevant for researchers of early modern prostitution. Many of these discuss prostitution as part of a wider study of early modern criminal activity.⁹ Some historians researching defamation litigation have shown how early moderns perceived prostitution and used its lexis in order to insult.¹⁰ Linnane (2003); Emerson (2002); and numerous books by Burford (1973; 1976; 1993) provide a good overview of prostitution in historic London. Browner (1994), in a useful introduction to the main themes of the subject, and Burford and Wotton (1995) deal more specifically with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mowry (2004) explores political pornography of the Restoration, analysing pornographies in their political context with the support of archival material. As we can see, much of this scholarship focuses upon life in London which, as we mentioned in the last chapter, reflects the concentrations of printed

material published in the city in the period. Quaife (1979), using depositions to the Quarter Sessions of the County of Somerset in the first sixty years of the seventeenth century, is one of the few historians to direct his research away from the capital and, in doing so, has significantly contributed to our knowledge of illicit sexual activity among the rural peasantry.

We must acknowledge, of course, that it is limiting to consider prostitution purely in relation to the seventeenth century; reading about scholars' treatments of prostitutes in other periods raises our awareness of the moral arguments surrounding prostitution as a practice and the differing ways in which the state attempted to counter the selling of sex.¹¹ Hence, in this chapter our chronological coverage, while centring on the seventeenth century, stretches beyond it. A selection of the best studies are Karras' (1996) excellent monograph on medieval prostitution and Griffiths' (1998) research on Elizabethan London; Henderson (1999); Rubenhold (2005) and Rosenthal's (2006) eighteenth-century studies; and Walkowitz (1982) and Attwood's (2011) work on the practice in Victorian society. Some scholars have contributed to the subject by compiling illuminating case studies of individual prostitutes.¹²

Scholars of women's history and the history of gender have done much to expand knowledge of the identities and experiences of early modern women and we can use their research as a framework in order to better understand the social and economic constraints faced by women working as prostitutes.¹³ Hughes (2012: 2–3) has explained the differences between women's history and the history of gender: 'Where women's history focuses on the nature, roles and experiences of women in the past, gender history attempts to make gendered definitions of identity and gender hierarchies central elements in all historical problems and periods.' One of the major strengths of gender history is that it considers what it means to be male as well as female, and regards the relationships between the genders as key to unlocking our understanding of societies. In this book, we endeavour not to view female prostitutes in isolation: we will examine them in relation to their interactions with men as well as other women, with their clients, facilitators, punishers and other men in their communities who might judge or make use of them.

In Chapter 4, in the first stage of our corpus-based analysis, we will show that there was a large variety of seventeenth-century nicknames for women who worked as prostitutes. This ambiguity in contemporary language increases the difficulty for scholars seeking to establish, for example, the numbers of prostitutes working in England during a certain period. At a time when even walking unaccompanied at night could lead to a woman being locked up in

Bridewell, it is often unclear whether women were selling sex commercially, were engaged in adulterous affairs or had simply annoyed the wrong person. Historians researching the practice of prostitution and the lives of prostitutes living in medieval and early modern England have not eschewed exploring diachronic change in concepts and terminology. The importance of recognizing the changing meanings of vocabulary in historical studies was advanced in the 1950s by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, who was paramount in shaping the field of *Begriffsgeschichte*, usually translated as conceptual history. Quentin Skinner, a historian associated with the historiographical movement known as the Cambridge School, is also linked to the advance of conceptual history. Believing that speech, rather than the written word, is the primary linguistic model, Skinner emphasized that context is fundamental to the understanding of historical texts and that words must be studied in terms of how they were understood by people living at the time a particular text was produced.¹⁴ Skinner's own studies of the changing concepts of the state and liberty have proved influential though his beliefs have also received criticism.

Social historians have been influenced by this 'linguistic turn' of history and are increasingly producing studies which, at their core, address what concepts people living in the past had in mind when they used certain words; it is now considered essential to resist applying concepts and terminology familiar to our own time without investigating whether these were conceived of in the period of study, and if so, in what ways. Wrightson (1991), for instance, in his exploration of the concept of social class in early modern societies, has influenced the work of Hitchcock (2012), who analyses the language used by authority figures in Warwickshire in the sixty years after 1670, and Shephard (2008), who examines how poor people described their own financial status during appearances as witnesses in court cases in the early modern period.

Tadmor (2001) was one of the very first scholars of early modern English history to investigate linguistic concepts by means of corpus methods. She showed how eighteenth-century language relating to the family, including words such as *mother*, *son* and *sister*, contained meanings specific to the period. Her second monograph, *The Social Universe of the English Bible* (2010), also explored word meaning. Withington (2013), mentioned in Chapter 1, has examined the semantics of *peace*, while research into the changing meaning of *commonwealth* as a 'keyword in a conceptual field' has been undertaken by an interdisciplinary group of scholars (Knights 2010). Within scholarship specifically relating to medieval and early modern prostitution, historians have discussed the contemporary meanings and implications of such terms as *nightwalker*, *harlot*,

bawd, *prostitute* and *whore* but, other than an engaging paper by linguists Nevala and Hintikka (2009), no scholar has analysed these terms using the full apparatus of corpus linguistics, most notably collocation.

Many historical investigations into early modern prostitution are based upon archival research, mostly of secular and church court reports. Bridewell records of the seventeenth century refer to harlots, vagrant nightwalkers, lewd women and whores. Paul Griffiths (1998: 212–38) has undertaken a diachronic study of the term *nightwalker* in early modern England. He explains that the term was fluid – used by different people, in different places and to mean different things. Before the seventeenth century, *nightwalker* tended to be used as an umbrella term to refer to suspicious people who were out of doors after dusk. Nightwalkers might be accused of being involved in disreputable activity but they were just as likely to be prostitutes' male clients, as they were the women themselves. However, Griffiths claims that, in the seventeenth century, the meaning of the term changed in metropolitan moral discourses. In London, it was increasingly appropriated by people targeting sexual immorality and, in the prosecutions of the Bridewell, was almost exclusively used to refer to females.¹⁵ Griffiths believes that this reflects the increasing scrutiny of female sexual identities in the period. However, outside of the capital, it was still men who were more likely to be prosecuted for nightwalking and they were accused of an array of disorderly and antisocial behaviour, including instigating riots, intimidating neighbours and stealing animals or crops.

Karras (1996: 11–12), in research on medieval Britain, has commented that writers did not carefully define the terms they used and that the law of the time 'often assumed a general understanding'. For instance, the term *meretrix*, the most frequently used Latin term to be translated as prostitute, was not always used to mean a woman involved in commercial exchange; it had a number of meanings, including a woman who had a large number of sexual partners.¹⁶ In other words, in medieval times, there was a fusion between the concepts of a woman who accepted money in return for sex and a woman who was judged to be sexually promiscuous. However, these concepts were also conceived separately as medieval people were aware that transactional sex took place.

McSheffrey (2006: 176–7), also looking at sexual reputation in the medieval period, has argued that a man deemed guilty of inappropriate behaviour might be referred to as a *harlot*. Both men and women could be called a *bawd* but only men were accused of being *strumpetmongers* or *whoremongers*. She argues the Anglo-French term *putour*, the male form for whore of *putayne*, was used in the fifteenth century to suggest a man who was sexually licentious or who facilitated

prostitution. This term only appears a handful of times in the seventeenth-century section of the EEBO corpus and all of these mentions reproduce the same snippet of text, defining a *putour* as a ‘man-bawd or woman-bawd, common Hazarders, Contector, Maintainer of Quarrels, Champertours of Embracers of Inquests, or other common Mildoers.’¹⁷ As we will argue in Chapters 5 and 6, by the early modern period, both *bawd* and *harlot* tended to be used as feminine terms. Greene (1592: 3) declared that a harlot is one ‘whose quiver is open to every arrow, who likes all that have fat purses, and loves none that are destitute of pence’, which suggests that harlots are female and that a transactional element is included in their sexually transgressive behaviour.

Other historians have isolated the terms *prostitute* and *whore* for comment; as Chapters 5 and 6 will show, the use and versatility of these terms by seventeenth-century writers has perhaps been underestimated by historians. Rosenthal (2006: 2, 25) finds little distinction between the uses of the terms *prostitute* and *whore* in the Restoration period – both terms consistently referred to females. Amster (2007: xi) has commented that *prostitute* was in use by the late sixteenth century to describe a woman who engaged in transgressive sexual activity, usually for money, but observes that the word appears in verb form only in the contemporary texts included in her collection. Turner (2002: xiv, 21) appears to suggest this process was reversed, noting that both *whore* and *prostitute* mutated into verbs from nouns. We will explore whether terms meaning *prostitute* appeared in noun or verb form in seventeenth-century texts in Chapter 6.

It appears that the intermeshing of perceptions of promiscuous women with those who charged for sexual intercourse recognized by Karras (see above) in medieval England continued well into the early modern period. Henderson (1999: 180) has written that in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries, the term *prostitution* was not in common usage; nor did any other word exist that pertained to sexual activity of an exclusively commercial nature. He adds that if a woman was described as being a *whore*, she was being accused of extramarital sexual activity but not necessarily of accepting payment for sex. He cites Mandeville’s *Modest Defence of Publick Stews* of 1724, which argued that prostitutes did not participate in sexual relations in order to satisfy uncontrollable lusts but were motivated by economic necessity, as the first delineation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ whoring in print. Rosenthal (2006: 4) agrees that seventeenth-century writers did not view prostitution as a form of work unless the tone of their work was comic or ironic.

It does appear that the insult *whore* was used as a convenient weapon against any woman who had provoked the ire of an acquaintance. Nash (1994: xv) contends, very simply, that “‘whore’ was used to describe any woman not liked”¹⁸ and Turner (2002: 5) refers to the term as a ‘fighting word’. Allegations of whoredom were a particularly useful means of publicly shaming women who were believed to have transgressed the conventions of respectable society. Such infringements were not restricted to commercial prostitution but included females who harboured pregnant single women in safe, albeit frequently insalubrious, houses, those who acted as a look-out during illicit sexual activity and those who were suspected of promiscuity. Hughes (2012: 22) has also described how accusations of whoredom, alongside those of cuckoldry, effeminacy and sodomy, were particularly useful weapons in the mid-seventeenth century against a backdrop of immense religious and political conflict. Freist (1995: 469, 474) has discussed how the phrase *whore of Babylon*, a popular insult directed towards the Catholic Church from the time of the Reformation, was borrowed by nonconformists attacking the Anglican High Church. She notes that terms such as *whore*, *gossip* or *whoremaster* were employed by both men and women to discredit political enemies during the Civil War and gained their power through the subordinate social status of women.

Women fought against sexual slurs. In 1633 70 per cent of the consistory court’s cases dealt with slander and defamation. Sharpe (1980: 15, 17) has shown that the use of the word *whore* in abuse constituted the basis for most litigation by women and that, among the lower orders in particular, there was great concern for the maintenance of a good sexual reputation. Gowing (1993: 2–4, 15), researching defamation cases in the consistory court in London, agrees that women’s sexualities were central to this kind of litigation, often provoked by the accusation *whore*. Gowing argues that the term might be voiced as an introduction to a further series of insults or was incorporated as part of a more detailed condemnation of a woman’s behaviour. Men were not accused of being whores; instead, they were insulted with words, such as *bawd*, *whoremaster* or *cuckold*, which related to the sexual behaviour of the women in their lives, or were targeted with the more general terms of *rogue* or *knave*. Gowing claims that the term *whore* ‘does not carry the financial implications of prostitution’, but does cite a number of cases where women accused of whoredom were thought to have received goods or money as a reward for sexual favours and also acknowledges that married men who socialized with such women were perceived to have threatened the economic well-being of their own household. In Chapter 5, Section 5.4.9 we will look more closely at the form of insults that contained

the word *whore* to ascertain if such verbal attacks were usually directed towards women who had engaged in transgressive but non-transactional sex. We will also explore in Chapters 5 and 6 whether the word *whore* in general did, or did not, denote a woman who has sex for money.

Chapter 5, Section 5.4.6 explores the meaning of the phrase *common whore* which has been identified by Mowry (2004: 6) as a specific term meaning prostitute. Henderson (1999: 180) agrees that the use of *common whore* ‘narrowed the field somewhat’ but argues that it was just as likely to be used to mean sexual immorality as it was to refer to commercial sex. He adds that *common whoring* was also used to describe the activity of male clients of prostitutes. Fouassier-Tate (2014: 79) has observed that the ‘obsessive recurrence of the word “common”’ evoked both the notion that a woman was socially inferior and that she was shared by many. Turner (2002) has explored the friction between the early modern binary categorization of a woman as either chaste or whorish, and the different ways in which women involved in the sale of sex were conceived. A kept mistress, for instance, was not viewed with the same level of disdain as the common whore who operated from a back alley. The notion that early modern prostitutes might be arranged in a hierarchical social structure, with the women who could demand the highest fees at the top, will be explored later in this chapter.

2.2 The regulation and punishment of prostitutes

Organized prostitution was introduced to England with the opening of whorehouses and bagnios in Roman times. In later times, Gropecuntlane, an Anglo-Saxon street name that was frequently to be found in the centre of English towns and cities, suggested the presence of prostitutes throughout the small kingdoms. The name described an area inhabited by prostitutes who had resorted to making a presumably meagre living by allowing clients to grope beneath their skirts.¹⁹

In the medieval period, official attitudes concerning the regulation of prostitution were inconsistent and this was due, in part, to the contradictory behaviour of the Christian Church in relation to the practice of commercial sex. The church had established a stronghold on morality by the ninth and tenth centuries and had formulated a rigorous definition of what constituted acceptable sexual activity, teaching that the prostitute was a reprobate who was forbidden burial in consecrated ground. However, leading ecclesiasts showed a

resigned acceptance of the trade from its earliest years. St Augustine believed that prostitution was morally wrong but viewed it as a necessary evil: 'If you do away with harlots, the world will be convulsed with lust.'²⁰ Likewise, in the thirteenth century St Thomas Aquinas compared prostitution with a sewer in a palace, albeit applying questionable logic: 'Take away the sewer and you will fill the palace with pollution. ... Take away prostitutes from the world and you will fill it with sodomy.'²¹ He furthermore argued that it was not immoral for the authorities to profit from prostitution as they could put the money to good use. Prostitution was usually prohibited in English towns but it seems that this was a half-hearted attempt to pay lip service to church teachings. Regular fines of brothel-keepers amounted to licensing fees and were fixed at a manageable rate.²²

Indeed, members of the early church proved to be willing accomplices in the business of prostitution. The most notable example of ecclesiastical involvement with prostitution is the Southwark brothels known as stews, legally operating under the jurisdiction of the bishops of Winchester from the early twelfth century.²³ By the mid-fourteenth century, the Bankside brothels, upstream from the bridge and running along the foreshore, had become so notorious that the whole neighbourhood had achieved the nickname 'Le Stuwes'.²⁴ Gangs of criminals operated alongside the prostitutes, frequently taking field trips to the city and sneaking back to Southwark with their ill-gotten gains. Unsurprisingly, the mayor of London had petitioned for jurisdiction over Southwark for many years. Pearson (1949: 112–13) notes that prostitutes operating in Southwark were known as *Winchester Geese*.²⁵

In medieval times, the official stance on brothels oscillated depending on the views of individual monarchs but even those kings who favoured a sterner approach and attempted to outlaw prostitution and banish those involved in the sex trade were not able to curb the practice. In 1393 a city ordinance illustrated the authorities' willingness to tolerate the presence of brothels in Cock's Lane (now known as Cock Lane) in Smithfield as well as the liberty of the Bishop in Southwark. A manuscript of regulations of the Southwark stews based on the ordinances passed by Parliament in 1162 but dating from the fifteenth century has been reproduced by both Karras (1989) and Post (1977); the former has modernized the English text of the ordinances. These regulations provide a great deal of information about how the stews were managed and give some indication of official attitudes towards brothels and the women who worked in them. Like many of the laws governing prostitution in other European countries, the fifteenth-century ordinances show that prostitutes were restricted to certain areas and banned from wearing certain clothing.²⁶

Henry VIII was arguably the most determined of all the English monarchs to stamp out prostitution and, during his reign, something resembling a state of war raged between city authorities and whorehouses. In 1513, probably concerned about military unrest, the king ordered that any woman caught selling her body to a soldier would be branded on the face with a hot iron.²⁷ In 1519, partly because of the vociferous outcry from respectable inhabitants who were weary of Southwark's grubby reputation, Cardinal Wolsey ordered a thorough search of London and its suburbs for unemployed men or loose women. Wunderli has written of the increased drive in the 1520s, particularly in 1520, 1523 and 1526, to prosecute pimps and prostitutes. The reforming zeal and harsh punishments of this time may account for the decline in the numbers of pimps and prostitutes who were charged around the turn of the sixteenth century.²⁸

Towards the end of his reign, in 1546, Henry VIII officially overturned the legality of the Southwark and Cock's Lane stews. The 1546 legislation was ostensibly aimed at reducing instances of crime and disorder and many historians have suggested that the closure of the public brothels was aimed at preventing the spread of syphilis. Increasingly staunch religious condemnation of prostitution was becoming more influential.²⁹ In the mid-sixteenth century a number of mayors pursued personal campaigns against prostitution. John Cotes, the mayor in 1542, ducked prostitutes in the Thames. Seven years later, the first Protestant mayor, Rowland Hill, punished many offenders by carting (a shame punishment entailing transporting someone through the streets in a cart), including, unusually, some male citizens of high social standing. Hill was also one of the founding members of the Bridewell which is discussed below. The introduction of the Bridewells demonstrates how the punishment of immorality was no longer believed to be solely the remit of the ecclesiastical authorities.³⁰

Although the legislation put in place during the reign of Henry VIII meant that it became unwise to manage a brothel openly, the suburb of Southwark retained its notorious reputation. Thomas Nashe described some of the colourful tricks employed by brothel-keepers to evade the law: 'back-doores, to come in and out vndiscoured. Slyding windowes also, and trappe-bordes in floars, to hyde whores behind and vnder, with false couterfet panes in walls, to be opened and shut like a wicket.'³¹ The Cardinal's Cap and the Bell, both mentioned by the historian John Stow, survived into the time of Shakespeare.³² A number of contemporary observers, including Thomas Nashe and John Taylor, believed that the entire metropolitan area had suffered as a result of the legislation. Bawds and prostitutes, finding it easier to operate more discreetly in places such as alehouses and taverns, were now scattered across the city.³³

Henry VIII died in 1547 and his child successor, Edward VI, reopened the Southwark brothels in 1550. At this time, Southwark was finally incorporated into the City of London and the authorities immediately attempted to curb its excesses. Around this time, the Bridewell, a former palace on the banks of the Fleet River, was given its charter as a house of correction and orphanage. The mayor and his officials were granted the authority to search suspected houses of disrepute in London and Middlesex and commit 'all ydell ruffians and taverne haunters, vagabonds, beggars and all persons of yll name and fame'.³⁴

The church court had been made officially responsible for punishing sexual misdemeanours in 1286 but when these crimes threatened public order, the secular courts, presided over by Justices of the Peace, might also become involved. Most Protestant countries no longer adhered to the authority of the old courts of the bishops after the Reformation but, as Wiesner-Hanks (2000: 70) has discussed, England continued to use church courts when Henry VIII broke with the papacy. They now operated under the ultimate authority of the monarch rather than the pope and were presided over by the same judges because most of the clergy had embraced Protestantism at the same time as the king. The boundary between ecclesiastical and secular jurisdictions was never fixed. Prosecutions for soliciting and prostitution were usually considered the business of the church courts but if a woman was accused of keeping a bawdy house or nightwalking, she stood a greater chance of being indicted in a secular court.

The legislation of 1576 ordered the introduction of houses of correction in all counties. By the early seventeenth century, a network of houses of correction had been established and these were referred to by the generic name of Bridewell. Although the houses of correction were sometimes used as conventional prisons where defendants could await a formal trial, the majority of their inhabitants were convicted by summary justice. Justices of the Peace tended to favour summary convictions because they constituted an inexpensive and flexible means of justice and ensured that the offender would genuinely suffer. The houses of correction were stinking, damp and filthy institutions. Inmates lived a savage and miserable existence and many died during their incarceration, some as a result of malnutrition. By the reign of Queen Mary, inmates were required to work in the Bridewells, such as labouring on the treadmill or beating out hemp with wooden mallets. By the mid-seventeenth century, they might even receive a salary for this work. Indeed the Bridewell aimed to reform its inmates by means of discipline, including physical beatings and hard labour.³⁵

Offenders were committed for an indefinite time but most were discharged within a week. However, those prisoners who were not able to pay the substantial

discharge fee usually had their sentences extended by around a fortnight. Justices ordered that around half of convicts be whipped immediately rather than await an order from sessions. Ironically, many prisoners preferred this as it increased their chances of a rapid release; those who had to wait for sessions to meet and determine their fate stayed on average for six weeks in Westminster where sessions met four times each year.³⁶ In his eighteen-part monthly publication, *The London Spy* (1698–1700), Edward Ward, who had visited both the men's and women's quarters of the London Bridewell, decried the manner in which half-naked women were publicly whipped.³⁷ The whipping post in this Bridewell was elevated in 1699 in order to give spectators a better view.³⁸ It was not unheard of for an offender to be thrown into a house of correction and forgotten about. Disease was rife to the extent that inmates, parish officials and even some Justices petitioned for an early release for many pleading ill health.

Life in the houses of correction was particularly dire for women. Rather than protecting the inmates, guards were usually brutal and expected bribes in order to provide basic provisions while fellow inmates – sentenced for all manner of crimes – posed an additional danger. Men and women were not kept apart and women were sometimes forced to sell their bodies in order to feed themselves. Some women who were awaiting trial for a more serious crime actively sought sex in the hope that a pregnancy would spare them the death penalty. How likely was it that a suspected prostitute would end up in the houses of correction? Although prostitution was an ecclesiastical offence and not strictly punishable by Justices of the Peace, the boundaries were sufficiently fluid to allow many women suspected of prostitution to be thrown into the houses of correction as 'idle and disorderly' persons who threatened public order. Robert Shoemaker has compiled statistics of commitments to the houses of correction between the years 1660 and 1725. He has found that 16 per cent of commitments referred to specific sexual offences such as soliciting, frequenting bawdy houses and picking up men or women. Moreover, those people accused of 'lewd' behaviour or 'nightwalking', 90 per cent of whom were female, could expect much longer sentences.³⁹ Occasionally, when the streets of London started to empty of prostitutes, men would raid the Bridewells and free women in order to allow them to return to their work.⁴⁰

Shoemaker has shown that women were twice as likely to be committed to the houses of correction as men, particularly if they were unmarried. Judgements were made on flimsy and circumstantial evidence. *Nightwalkers* were people, according to John Bond, who were 'suspected, or of ill fame, such as sleep in the day time, and in the night season haunt houses suspected for bawdry, or use

suspicious company'.⁴¹ Although many women apprehended as nightwalkers, some repeatedly, were operating as prostitutes, any unaccompanied woman out of doors during the night could be charged under the term. A woman might be arrested because a constable believed that she was dressed like a prostitute or because she was walking in a street favoured by prostitutes. Others were apprehended simply because they had a history of prostitution. Shoemaker has commented on the double standard of justice as women charged with sexual offences, including adultery, tended to be committed to the houses of correction while men were usually bound over by recognizance or completely let off.⁴²

The Bridewell was regarded by moral commentators as a 'godly foundation' and its governors were characterized as 'men of much worship and wisdom'.⁴³ There is evidence that some people regarded the houses of correction as reform schools where unruly apprentices and ungrateful children could learn to better their behaviour. Some parents committed their own children. By the early seventeenth century, the Bridewells had essentially abandoned their attempts to reform inmates and became just another set of prisons.⁴⁴ There is little to suggest that women committed for sexual offences were at all likely to change their ways. Shoemaker has shown that the rates of re-offending were high: in 1700, 35 per cent of the 422 women convicted of prostitution were recidivists, including 5 per cent who were convicted five or more times in that year.⁴⁵ The social stigma at having endured a sentence in the houses of correction was considerable and it meant that many convicts found it very difficult to obtain legitimate work on release. Some prostitutes became further indebted to controlling bawds as the latter had paid their discharge fees.⁴⁶ Prostitutes who were also charged with a more serious crime, such as theft or murder, would most likely spend time in prison, such as the Clink, located beside the Bishop of Winchester's Palace, or the Fleet, on the eastern bank of the Fleet River.

If a convicted prostitute managed to avoid a spell in prison or the houses of correction, it was unlikely that she would be released without any penalty. In 1553, the year of her accession, Queen Mary ordered that prostitutes and brothel-keepers should be punished in cages, pillories and stocks. These instruments of justice were installed in every London parish and became objects of fear for ordinary people. Prostitutes might also be carted as an additional social deterrent and, during this period, the punishment became considerably more perilous. Crowds would surround the cart banging metal bowls and, in some cases, the offender would be flogged. Carting could result in death: in 1599 Philip Gawdy reported: 'Ther is heavy newes out of Brydewell. For Mall Neuberry and Mall Digby haue bene carted three dayes together, when one of

them had lyke to haue bene killd with a blowe of a stone vppon her forehede.⁴⁷ Prostitutes were also sometimes grouped together with women who disturbed the peace under the category of scolds. A frequent punishment for this type of offence was the cucking-stool to which the unfortunate woman would be tied, either outside her home or at the place where she allegedly committed her crime. Ducking-stools seem to have fulfilled a similar purpose but usually involved the victim being dipped into the nearest pond or river until she struggled for breath.

Elizabeth I, perhaps in an attempt to appear her father's natural successor, reinstated legislation initially put in place during the reign of Henry VIII, including closing the stews. In 1565, the authorities ordered that re-offending whores who had already spent time in Bridewell should have their heads shaved, be whipped and imprisoned.⁴⁸ In the winter of 1576–7, a purge of spectacular proportions, provoked by an upsurge in moralism, resulted in a barrage of charges against workers in London's brothels, although the numbers of male clients prosecuted dropped proportionately at this time.⁴⁹ Philip Stubbes is often referred to by historians as an Elizabethan moralizer who condemned a generous array of sins. In *Anatomie of Abuses* of 1583, he denounced card playing, playhouses and gambling but he believed that prostitution was the greatest social problem of all. His proposed solution was unswervingly harsh: after wistfully concluding that execution was unacceptable, he advised that any woman caught selling her body should be 'cauterized and seared with a hote iron on the cheeke, forehead' or some other visible body part to ensure she be distinguishable from chaste women.⁵⁰ However, as Griffiths (1993: 54) argues, the existence of prostitution and its four major components – pimps, bawds, whores and clients – had earned its place in Elizabethan London and induced a 'certain fatalism' in the authorities.⁵¹

2.3 Official attitudes towards prostitutes in the seventeenth century

In the late sixteenth century, prostitution on the Bankside was more readily available, indiscreet and outrageous than ever. During the reign of Henry VIII, the King's Bailiff of Southwark, William Baseley, had bought the lease of the Manor House of Paris Gardens and obtained royal permission to convert it into a gambling club. Elizabeth I presented the Manor and its land to her cousin Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, who proceeded to grant licences to stew holders.

The Paris Gardens brothels tended to be classier establishments, catering for wealthy clients and offering dice and refreshments as well as sex. In 1603 the Manor House was taken over by the incorrigible Donna Britannica Hollandia who was arguably the most infamous bawd of her time.⁵²

After the Reformation, citizens were not only expected to adhere to the official brand of Christianity but to maintain the highest standards of Christian behaviour: to be sober, chaste, compliant and conscientious. Some historians have identified the period from the middle of the sixteenth century to the Civil War in the 1640s as being particularly hazardous for women because a general obsession with social disorder meant they were under enormous pressure to conform to accepted gender roles.⁵³ The growing influence of the Puritans from the beginning of the seventeenth century resulted in a massive spurt in prosecutions for sexual impropriety. In 1604, at the beginning of James' reign, a revised canon law obliged church-wardens to report to the courts 'all persons who offended their brethren by committing adultery, whoredom, incest or any other uncleanness or wickedness in life'. Most accusations are thought to have been made on the basis of rumour or gossip. In the larger towns, it is likely that prostitutes were among those accused of fornication. The convicted 'fornicator' was forced to walk in the Sunday parish procession, wearing a white sheet and carrying a candle.⁵⁴

This punishment was an example of the problem faced by the church courts. They were not permitted to fine or imprison offenders and moral reformers were frustrated by their 'soft' stance towards vice. Shame punishments were deemed to be ineffective and threats such as excommunication, while possibly instilling fear in some members of the community, were disregarded by hardened pimps and prostitutes. It has been argued that because ordinary people were accustomed to being socially disciplined by means of a variety of tribunals and attended court hearings regularly, they found the experience less galling than we would today.⁵⁵ In 1646 the church courts were temporarily suspended, partly because it was believed that the secular authorities were more capable and inclined to counter sin.

Draconian views held by earlier commentators such as Stubbes had clearly influenced the highest authorities: James I, who had a reputation for heavy drinking and immoderate spending but no personal interest in whores, revived the practice of branding incorrigible rogues with a large letter R and considered extending this punishment to prostitutes.⁵⁶ In an attempt to impede a marked increase in the numbers of brothels in the capital, James approved of a series of mass raids of bawdy houses in the 1620s. On one day in August 1620 nineteen

women were convicted of keeping brothels at Middlesex Quarter Sessions; sixteen of them operated in the Cowcross area. The raids proved ineffective in the long term.

An ordinance of December 1622, containing a special clause aimed at preventing beadles and headboroughs conniving with prostitutes in return for bribes, suggests official corruption was a serious problem. If those charged with curbing the activity on the frontlines were complicit in its continuation, then commercial sex was simply unstoppable. A second ordinance of January 1624 stated that no person charged 'of Bawdrys and Whordome' would be released on bail unless two sureties came forward. It further listed the places that were targeted for raids: Cowcross, Cock's Lane, Smithfield, St John Street, Clerkenwell, Norton Folgate, Shoreditch, Wapping, Whitechapel, Petticoat Lane, Charterhouse, Bloomsbury and Ratcliffe. Burford (1973: 218–20) draws attention to the absence of the Bankside stews and Old Paris Garden in both ordinances: although these continued to flourish in the reign of Elizabeth, it seems that many London inhabitants now preferred to spend their free hours on the other side of the river.

Charles I, noted for his elevated morals, came to the throne in 1625 and, like the monarchs that had ruled before him, attempted to address the widespread 'open bawdry' that dominated much of the city. In a directive of July in the year of his accession, he requested that the Lord Chief Justice take the matter in hand. Despite harassment at the hands of the Lord Chief, the brothels and their workers continued to burgeon and, in many cases, to prosper.

Griffiths (2008: 202–3, 217, 225) has written of a change in crime prosecutions after 1600 – although more women were prosecuted overall, the numbers charged with prostitution slumped, with the lowest ratio of sexual immorality crimes in Bridewell's overall caseload coming between 1648 and 1652. Londoners were keen for their city to be reformed, but many inhabitants believed that it would be more effective to target vagrants and improve shoddy buildings than it would be to round up prostitutes. Indeed, Griffiths shows that vagrancy prosecutions soared in the same period. Bridewell itself suffered from a poor public image and some citizens found its moral crusade against sexual transgression to be pointless and intrusive. Moreover, its unique ability to 'police, prosecute, and punish in a single sweep' was not supported by any parliamentary act which gave its critics further ammunition.

In 1641, on the eve of the Civil War, there was a softening in legislation affecting English prostitutes. Parliament decreed that prostitution itself was no longer a crime but only a 'Nuisance if committed in public'. The penalty for

prostitutes usually consisted of a whipping and a short stay in prison. However, this relaxation was abandoned during the Civil War wars and attitudes hardened to a greater extent in the wake of the eventual Puritan triumph. The Civil War was a challenging time to live through. Hughes (2012: 4–5) has described how society was dislocated and divided: taxation spiralled, military requisitioning was common and families were often expected to provide board and lodgings for soldiers. Whores were often to be found wherever there was a dense concentration of soldiers, and some prostitutes certainly made a living following the Royalist army which was headquartered at Oxford. Charles I made clear his contempt for the common whore, loathing the ‘general licentiousness, profanity, drunkenness, and whoremongering of the army’. Those prostitutes who disguised themselves as men were threatened with ‘the Severest punishment which Law and our displeasure shall inflict’.⁵⁷ In his satirical pamphlet of 1642, *St Hillaries Teares*, John Taylor described how prostitutes were suffering a slump in trade: ‘If you step aside into Coven-Garden, long Acre, and Drury-Lane, where those Doves of Venus, those Birds of youth, and beauty, (the wanton Ladies) doe build their nests, you shall finde them in such a dump of amazement, to see the hopes of their trading frustrate.’ These ladies could no longer afford to have their hairs styled, their clothes had been pawned and they were living on a modest diet of cheese and onions.⁵⁸

In 1647 the Long Parliament, dominated by Puritans, finally closed the Southwark stews. Three years later, the Rump Parliament passed an act bringing all types of sexual immorality under the jurisdiction of the lay courts. Incest and two consecutive prosecutions for adultery were henceforth punishable by death. Those found guilty of running a brothel were to be whipped, branded on the forehead with the letter B and sentenced to three years of imprisonment. If they continued to trade in the same business after their release, they would forfeit their lives.⁵⁹ The period of Cromwell’s leadership proved difficult for prostitutes living in the capital. Many brothels were taken over by merchants and reopened as warehouses while alehouses and taverns, regular haunts for whores, were placed under strict regulations and frequently raided. Popular entertainments such as plays, gambling and bear-baiting were also prohibited; actors who continued to perform were publicly whipped and anyone caught attending a play was heavily fined. In 1655, in what was probably a sign of the times, the Hope Theatre, which was often used for animal-baiting entertainment, was pulled down possibly to make way for tenements, and the seven bears who appeared there on Tuesdays and Thursdays were shot. The theatre was subsequently rebuilt as the Beargarden in the 1660s and was visited by Pepys.

This policy of no toleration was a striking and authentic attempt to wipe out immorality and it was most likely effective in the short term. No records of the numbers of brothel-keepers apprehended exist. Many whores probably returned to the capital after the Royalist defeat, but, according to pamphlets of the time, it seems that trade was less than buoyant. Linanne writes that, after 1652, many whores chose to operate from coffee houses rather than taverns.⁶⁰ *A Dialogue Between Mistris Macquerella, a Suburb Bawd, Mistris Scolopendra, a Noted Curtezan, and Mr. Pimpinello, an Usher ... Bemoaning the Act against Adultery and Fornication*, published by Edward Crouch in 1650 complains of the lack of customers and the constant need for vigilance against official raids. The characters express a wistful nostalgia for the old days:

When citizens each day
Were glad to pray and pay:
Most eager for to sease
Upon the French disease ...⁶¹

The constant Puritan endeavour for high standards of public morality tended to irritate those people who were not directly involved in its conception. The Interregnum legislation against actors only succeeded in forcing theatre troops out of the capital proper and into surrounding villages such as Knightsbridge.⁶² Certainly, the fact that the act of 1650 was not renewed with the Restoration of the monarchy suggests that it was either unpopular or ineffective. The only woman to be executed for a sexual offence was Ursula Powell who was hung in August 1652 for whoredom (in this case adultery rather than prostitution) with an unknown man after the birth of her baby. Her death prompted public outrage. Indeed, despite Puritan determination to flush out and eliminate sexual immorality, jurors of the period became increasingly reluctant to treat female defendants harshly. In the last decades of the seventeenth century, Justices were far less likely to impose shaming punishments, such as the pillory, stocks or a public whipping, on convicted offenders. At the beginning of the eighteenth century they turned instead to sentences involving spells in the houses of correction where the whipping would, at least, take place in private. In 1660 the powers of the church courts were reinstated but they were never able to regain their former authority.⁶³

Arnold (2011: 90) writes that when Charles II arrived in London to claim his throne in May 1660, 'the city erupted into one giant party which was to last the rest of his life'. The king did show a certain willingness to increase state control over the movement of prostitutes. From 1388 onwards, the English state had

issued a series of laws which attempted to prevent vagrancy and begging, and by the sixteenth century, sturdy (able-bodied) beggars, vagabonds and rogues were widely condemned in literary discourse. Prostitutes were perceived as belonging to this group of social outcasts. Thomas Harman, a landowner who lived near Dartford, published a popular pamphlet in 1573 identifying twenty-three different kinds of vagabonds he claimed to have personally encountered. They included those who feigned illness, disability; insanity or calamity in order to obtain alms (palliards or clapperdudgeons; counterfeit cranks; Abraham men; dommerars; demanders for glimmer; whipjacks or freshwater mariners). Autem morts were female adulterers who travelled with thieving children and doxies were women who teamed up with a succession of male rogues. Whether or not Harman was embellishing the existence of these very specific categories of vagabonds, it is likely that there were wandering prostitutes, perhaps known as doxies in some cases, whom both local and central authorities were keen to restrain.⁶⁴ On 9 May 1661 Charles II invoked the earlier poor laws by issuing *A Proclamation, For the due Observation of certain Statutes made for the Suppressing of Rogues, Vagabonds, Beggars, and other idle disorderly persons, and for Relief of the Poore*, which gave the authorities the power to return the offending vagrant back to their parish of legal settlement.⁶⁵ This act affected the movement of a wide variety of people who were considered to live on the outskirts of society, including prostitutes, Irish travellers and others whose major crime was their destitution.⁶⁶

One wonders if Charles II connected the prostitutes detained under the 1661 act as idle disorderly persons with the ones to whom he made personal visits. It was well known that the king enjoyed spending time in whorehouses; one of his many mistresses, Louise de Querouaille, accused him of infecting her with syphilis. Charles had his own personal pimp, William Chiffinch, who presented him with a fresh supply of girls from brothels and playhouses. This atmosphere of liberation could not fail to spread into the public domain. Playhouses were reopened, often offering bawdy productions and bawds found, to their delight, that business was once again booming. The Restoration years saw the establishment of a wealthy merchant class in London, which resided in well-decorated houses and had their domestic needs met by small crews of servants. This new estate sought escapism in London's traditional entertainments of plays, gambling and whoring and was responsible, particularly after the destruction wrought by the Great Fire of London in 1666, for the relocation of many whorehouses to fashionable Covent Garden in the west of the city.⁶⁷

The succession of James II, who preferred a more sedate atmosphere at court, did little to reverse the public taste for bawdry. His establishment of the fortnight-long May Fair, off Piccadilly, was partly an attempt to divert trade away from Bartholomew Fair which had acquired a reputation for satisfying its visitors' baser urges. However, debauchery followed money and, soon enough, the May Fair became almost as famous for its newly arrived prostitute population.⁶⁸ Yet the Restoration period can be viewed as a cultural blip where a nation in flux experimented with greater freedoms and openness. It did not last. In the last decades of the seventeenth century a new kind of punishment awaited prostitutes who had been convicted of theft or some other meagre charge: transportation, a fate that was dreaded by some more than even the gallows.⁶⁹ A vagrancy act of 1597 had authorized the transportation of offenders overseas and by the early 1620s several hundred young people had been banished abroad.⁷⁰ Most of those transported, usually to the American colonies, were not given a choice in the matter. Transportation had already been used as a weapon against prostitution in 1656 when several hundred whores were sent to the West Indies in order to boost the region's birth rate. In 1697 the English government was so keen to rid itself of troublesome women languishing in London jails, that it paid £8 a head to get fifty women shipped to the West Indies. Descriptions of the arduous journey across the seas were widespread to the extent that in 1789 four women, horrified by the prospect of the journey, shocked the country by choosing death over transportation.⁷¹ Many women who suffered transportation had been prostitutes and during the journey they were expected to service the male crew free of charge; if they were lucky, such an arrangement would entail better food and accommodation. The remainder of the passengers were forced to spend the vast majority of their time below decks where thirst and air deprivation often proved fatal.

2.4 Policing seventeenth-century London

Neither the ecclesiastical or temporal courts had much success in prosecuting prostitutes: 'pitiful police methods and abject poverty ensured a constant supply of willing women on the streets, so that, like Hydra's heads, for every prostitute put out of business several more appeared in her place' (Wunderli 1981: 98). The term 'policing' should be used with care with regard to this period: the policing that did exist was rudimentary, amateur, volunteer and reluctant.⁷² By the sixteenth century, London had developed a number of

regulatory institutions. Their effectiveness depended on the zeal and ability of the agents involved in the running of the local government. In 1614, for instance, the Lord Mayor wrote to the Lord Chamberlain emphasizing his commitment to cleaning up London. He did not shirk from getting his hands dirty, visiting brothels personally in disguise and arranging for their prostitutes to be whipped, carted or banished.⁷³

After 1285, a public watch system was installed in London, whereby every householder, under the leadership of a constable and beadle, was required to take part in a watch. Only the beadle himself held a salaried and uniformed position. Constables were unpaid, part-time officers who had been elected to their position by the wardmote and the Court of the Common Council. In addition to supervising the watch, they were expected to arrest vagrants and oversee curfews. Twenty-six wards employed the services of a beadle and were subdivided into precincts. In London, there were 242 precincts served by constables who were charged with maintaining the peace.⁷⁴

Male heads of households became increasingly unwilling to take part in the nightwatch voluntarily: the growth of London's population meant that the night-time streets became a more threatening environment for an untrained volunteer. From the late sixteenth century, paid deputies often replaced the amateur nightwatchmen, although their reputation for efficacy was scarcely any better.⁷⁵ It was mainly the watchmen who interacted on a nightly basis with prostitutes. Part of their duties entailed arresting whores but it was common knowledge that many preferred the warmth and security of their sentry boxes. Many of the watchmen were old and infirm and too afraid to arrest a woman in case her friends defended her; others preferred to drink and chat with prostitutes rather than control their behaviour. If a watchman did persist in an arrest, he was responsible for pressing the charge the following morning in court. This was not necessarily a straightforward procedure and it was not unheard of for a woman charged with disorderly behaviour to sue for wrongful arrest.⁷⁶

At any rate, it tended to only be the loud and outrageous women on the streets who got the attention of the watchmen: those who were able to conduct their business more discreetly indoors were able to avoid prosecution and, in some cases, quietly amass a considerable fortune.⁷⁷ Archer has described how some keepers were protected by high-ranking or wealthy patrons; brothels were popular among members of the nobility or foreign merchant community. 'These patterns of clientage meant that Bridewell's investigations often stirred muddy waters near the centre of power.'⁷⁸ Nashe declared that prostitution had 'great patrons' and 'almost none are punished for it that have a good purse.'⁷⁹ Beadles

and constables continued to receive terrible press in the seventeenth century. It was widely believed that they accepted bribes in order to turn a blind eye to the presence of a brothel, sometimes in the shape of free intercourse with a prostitute.

2.5 The road to prostitution

In the seventeenth century, the majority of prostitutes were probably not tricked or enticed into entering the trade. By far the largest contributing factor in refreshing the ranks of prostitutes was poverty. To understand the challenges facing seventeenth-century women, we must be aware of demographic and economic changes occurring much earlier, from the late fifteenth century, which meant that poverty became a more visible and threatening phenomenon in England.⁸⁰ Throughout the sixteenth century, poorer members of society struggled against an array of challenges to their economic well-being which was compounded by restrictions on traditional types of poor relief.

Unemployment became a major problem in areas of the country that did not develop as major manufacturing centres: the south-east and parts of the Midlands prospered while the economy of the north, particularly the north-east, stalled. Larger landowners began to employ more efficient methods of agricultural production which often required fewer workers. The expansion in agricultural commercialization meant that very small landholders struggled to turn a profit and many found their land absorbed into the estates of nobles or more successful yeomen. Indeed, small landowners, particularly those who lived in open-field villages, faced intolerable pressures throughout the sixteenth century. Beier (1985: 21) has given the example of the Cambridge village of Chippenham where the percentage of landless householders increased from 3.5 per cent in 1279 to 32 per cent in 1544. By 1712, 63 per cent of Chippenham villagers were landless. As smaller farmers decreased in number, wage labourers were less able to fall back on working on their parents' farms in times of hardship.

The practice of enclosing open-field areas, which frequently meant the loss of common grazing rights, reached its height in the 1490s but persisted throughout the seventeenth century and beyond. The effect of enclosure upon small farmers and landless wage labourers has been the subject of much historical debate but it can safely be identified as a leading factor in population displacement and the cause of very real hardship, particularly for those without land.⁸¹ The practice of enclosing was connected to the realization by many landowners that they could

make an easier profit by turning their land over to pastoral farming. Up to around 1520, farms and sometimes entire villages were given over to pasture, frequently by means of engrossing whereby a number of farms were amalgamated.⁸² Sheep breeding, which northern farmers in particular turned to, required far less labour than arable agriculture and found an easy profit by means of the country's expanding cloth industries. Meanwhile, those who worked in the cloth industries had a greater degree of job security in general but were still vulnerable to long economic slumps between 1550 and 1640.⁸³

Harvest failure was common and increased pressure on people who were already facing severe economic challenge and food riots were not out of the ordinary. Harvest failures that took place in consecutive years, such as the four years in the middle of the sixteenth century and those between 1586 and 1588, led to mass starvation. Historians have identified inflation as a further cause of economic hardship. Over a course of nearly 150 years, prices rose by an average of around 4 per cent each year.⁸⁴

Another significant contributing factor to widespread poverty was population increase throughout the century. There is debate over when this demographic change began: some historians argue that renewed growth started in the 1450s but others believe the population remained stagnant until the 1520s.⁸⁵ Beier (1985: 19) has calculated that from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, the population grew from around 2.7 to 5.2 million. It is certainly safe to say that the sixteenth century saw a significant increase in population size and that this growth was not accompanied by a similar expansion in job opportunities. Instances of plague, albeit actually reducing the population, compounded the predicaments of poorer members of society. Plague was a recurrent problem from its first appearance in England in 1348 and during the sixteenth century many areas of the country were afflicted. Urban areas were often more badly affected: Norwich, for instance, lost at least one third of its population in the two years between 1579 and 1580 and continued to experience an outbreak every five years until the end of the century. The death of a primary breadwinner was often disastrous for the remaining members of his family. Moreover, in times of plague, employers were able to flee to safer areas, taking opportunities for work with them. Rural inhabitants were by no means immune to the effects of plague: even if their village remained free from infection, farmers were unwilling to travel into affected areas to sell surplus produce which reduced their incomes.⁸⁶

Leonard (1900: 16) defined this period as a time of transition: manufacture was expanding in the beginning of the sixteenth century but feudalism was ebbing away and many long-established occupations started to disappear.

Large-scale peasant migration to urban areas meant that many cities, particularly London, became crowded with unskilled male labourers seeking work. The women and children who accompanied them fared no better. Between 1600 and 1700, the suburbs north of the Thames increased by 76 per cent. McMullen (1984: 20–1) has provided some occupation statistics for the period around the turn of the seventeenth century: approximately 90 per cent of London's inhabitants were 'artisans and urban poor' and 13 per cent of these were working as domestic servants. Refused entry to guilds and crafts, women found it almost impossible to acquire permanent employment. London, along with other cities in Western Europe, is estimated to have had between one-quarter and one-half of its inhabitants surviving on incomes below subsistence level. McMullen (*ibid.*) estimates that around one in every seven people was unemployed or unemployable.

In 1536 an act entitled *For Punishment of Sturdy Vagabonds and Beggars* for the first time ordered that voluntary alms were to be collected and distributed each week by collectors of the poor in every parish specifically for the relief of the indigent poor. Begging was outlawed entirely and casual almsgiving was also largely prohibited. Instead, the charitably inclined were invited to place donations in a common box. This rudimentary form of state welfare developed throughout the century, culminating in the introduction of the Old Poor Law in 1597 which underwent minor revisions in 1601. Wealthier inhabitants of each parish were charged a compulsory tax which was collected by parish administrators and directly distributed to the local poor. However, people without the means to feed themselves or their families were not necessarily eligible to receive poor relief. The very nature of the system, in which payments were collected and distributed at a local level, meant that decisions regarding eligibility directly affected the economic well-being of individual parishes. The overseer of the poor, the official who determined which members of the community should receive relief, was expected to make his decisions with great care. Meanwhile, throughout the seventeenth-century, reformers such as Samuel Hartlib, Thomas Firmin and John Bellers were troubled by the increasing cost of national welfare and proposed schemes for making poor people pay for themselves. People living in poverty were divided into the deserving and undeserving, and this categorization effectively governed who would receive outdoor relief, such as food, clothes and money, and who would get nothing. Deserving cases included some elderly people, orphans and those burdened with young children, particularly if they had been widowed. However, not all elderly people, nor those with disabilities, nor those in poor health, were automatically pensioned: every

person was expected to work in any capacity possible for as long as they could manage or until they died.

Single childless women were not considered deserving of poor relief: they were expected to be kept by their families or to support themselves by earning a wage, preferably by working for a member of their own family or as a servant. Unmarried women were not permitted to manage businesses of their own or to work independently, although a handful of female entrepreneurs did thrive in this period. In research on the position of single women in early modern England, Froide (2005: 35–7, 218) has concluded that they led exceptionally difficult lives. In terms of education, the most that poorer girls could hope to receive was a few years of training in an informal classroom setting and those who went on to find work usually earned a third to a half of men's wages.⁸⁷ Those women who were unable to support themselves – and many full-time wages of the period did not cover basic living expenses – were enrolled to labour on urban stocks of flax, hemp and wool. Younger girls whose parents were unable to feed them were customarily forced into apprenticeships in sewing, spinning and housewifery. In official documents, a number of female parishioners were recorded as making a living through prostitution or 'in bawdry'.⁸⁸ Indeed, local officials occasionally suggested that pauper women work as whores or beg locally to prevent them becoming a burden on the parish. In 1751, officers refused to provide relief to Mary Johnson of Bishopgate, declaring that she 'might go a whoring or a thieving' to support herself. In this way, many women were pushed into the trade for want of any alternative.⁸⁹ It appears then that it was sometimes more socially acceptable to work as a prostitute than to claim poor relief.

The 1690s, in particular, was a decade of intense economic deprivation, with immigrants competing for insecure and scanty employment opportunities, bread prices being unusually high and there being a disruption to trade as a result of war. Consecutive years of harvest failure between 1695 and 1698 contributed to growing numbers of destitute poor and fuelled the belief in the necessity of establishing workhouses.⁹⁰ The political upheaval of the mid-seventeenth century had a dire effect upon families: as Fraser (1984: 193) has argued participation in warfare meant that women and children were robbed of their natural protector and also their economic provision. After the Civil War, there was a noticeable excess of women over men in the population of England and many young gentlewomen struggled to find a suitable marriage.⁹¹ A high-class whore with whom Dunton's (1696, October edition) narrator converses explains that as a result of the wars and of nature producing more girls than boys, 'It is impossible that there should be a Man for every Woman, and

therefore of necessity some of our unhappy Sex must be exposed to languish for want of such Conversation as Nature hath fitted them for.' Cavalier daughters, in particular, suffered as a result of reduced social status. The political conflict often compromised their education, which was primarily designed for the acquisition of social accomplishments designed to improve their marriageability. Moreover, they now faced stiff competition from middle-class girls offering fat dowries.⁹²

Those gentlewomen who were unable to find a husband may have found safe harbour in a respectable position such as a lady's companion or a housekeeper. However, others were less willing to swallow their pride, preferring the option of mistress to a wealthy guardian.⁹³ Keeping a mistress was not only regarded as entirely normal for rich men, both married and single, it was thought to be appropriate behaviour: Francis North, Lord Guildford, earned disapproval among his peers for failing to 'keep a whore'.⁹⁴ Moreover, some gentlewomen who had the potential to secure an offer of matrimony much preferred the financial and social independence life as a courtesan made possible. Fraser (1984: 398) has argued that even young girls who managed to find suitable marriages had low expectations for happiness. In 1695 Lady Russell wrote a revealing letter to her teenage daughter, advising her that 'life is a continual labour'.

Of course, the position of a mistress was by no means secure. If a kept woman had not managed to accrue financial independence by the time her beauty was perceived to have faded, she might find herself in grim circumstances.⁹⁵ To succeed as a courtesan, a woman usually required a certain level of education and gentility. The most successful of these women did not simply rely on their looks: as Linnane (2003: 125) has described, by the eighteenth century, courtesans were regarded as the supermodels of their day and offered their wit, knowledge and elegance along with sexual favours. There were well-known cases of women from distinctly lowly backgrounds acquiring wealthy beaux, the most famous being Nell Gwyn, but, for the most part, a woman from the ranks of the masses was unlikely to attain such a status.

Fortunately for the mistress, it was expected that an admirer would shower his lover with more clothes, food and entertainment than she could possibly require as a symbol of his own economic prowess. Just as a courtesan differed from a regular prostitute in terms of being able to select her clients with a view to their financial viability, she also took a distinct approach with regard to payment and might have accepted presents in lieu of or in addition to hard cash. As Rubenhold (2005: 47–8) notes, to the dismay of disapproving moralists, many professional ladies lived in a manner that rivalled the lavishness of their lovers' wives: they wore beautiful clothes and jewels, rode in private coaches and

lodged in some of the most fashionable and beautifully decorated residences in the country. Moreover, if their admirer was unmarried, they stood a decent chance of eventually becoming his wife. Some lowly born mistresses adopted their lovers' surnames rather than use their own unexceptional names. As shown above, the rudimentary welfare system in seventeenth-century England guaranteed no automatic right to poor relief. It was common, therefore, for mistresses to be financially supporting a whole host of needy relatives and friends; as a result, they were often just as trapped in their situations as their married contemporaries.⁹⁶

It was sensible for these ladies to maintain flirtations with numerous men of their acquaintance – some had affairs with several men at the same time – in case their primary beau became bored and looked for another conquest. Nell Gwyn's fame outlived her but a number of lesser known ladies frequently featured in contemporary news articles and everyday gossip. Fraser (1984: 399–410) has documented the lives of Catherine Sedley, an heiress who chose the life of a mistress, and the beautiful Jane Myddelton, daughter of Sir Robert Needham, who despite an early marriage, enjoyed dalliances with several wealthy men.

Some kept women were fortunate in their choice of protector (or, probably more accurately, their protector's choice of them), but others found their position as a mistress to be fragile and unhappy. Henry Sidney, created Earl of Romney in 1694, demonstrated particular brutality when dealing with his mistresses. Although he never married and was a man of substantial means, Sidney sired numerous children and did not feel it necessary to provide for any of them. His longstanding mistress, Grace Worthley, was a widow of severely reduced circumstances, her husband having died during the second Dutch War in 1665. After twenty years of being his lover, Grace was abandoned by Henry Sidney in favour of the glamorous Diana, Countess of Oxford, and, in one instance, conducted away from the doorway of his residence by a constable and beadle. A more shocking example of mistreatment is the case of Ann Bell who was raped and slashed with a penknife by her wealthy keeper. He broke her hands before dumping her in an upmarket brothel in Covent Garden.⁹⁷

Rubenholt (2005: 91–2, 95, 99, 196) has written of another danger to which high-class ladies of pleasure were susceptible: although it was arguably wise for them to possess no real regard for their lover, their hearts were frequently engaged elsewhere. The subject of their affection was often incapable of providing for them financially being, for instance, a younger son, half-pay officer or poor clergyman who was himself reliant on snagging a wealthy bride. It was very much in the best interests of a mistress to make absolutely sure that any additional

affairs were conducted with the utmost secrecy. One woman, Charlotte Hayes, made a fatal mistake by flaunting a second relationship in public: on the death of her wealthy keeper, she received nothing more than five pounds in his will for the purpose of purchasing a mourning ring or other token of remembrance.

No doubt predating the earliest mentions of the phenomenon in the early sixteenth century, children – commonly between the ages of seven and fourteen – were sold into prostitution by poverty-stricken parents right up until the nineteenth century. Other children, abandoned by their parents or orphaned without an inheritance, had little choice but sell their bodies in order to survive. Former peasants, who had migrated to cities in order to find work, had little use for children who would previously have been able to provide a useful service as a farmhand. Stone (1981: 216–31) believed that most parents in this period paid little attention to their children and held no real affection for them. He argued that although there is no simple linear progress in the parent–child relationship, it being necessary to trace change country by country, and class by class, it was not until the eighteenth century that upper-class families became loving and nurturing. The lot of poorer children did not improve until the nineteenth century as a result of improvements to the welfare system, schooling and a healthier economic climate. Stone's work kick-started scholarly interest in early modern families but his views on parental lack of affection have since been contradicted many times. Laurence (1994: 90–2), for instance, believes that by looking at the diaries, personal papers and letter of parents, it is evident that they loved their children as much as we do today. She argues that high infant mortality made parents more inclined to expect and accept death, but that the loss of a child remained a devastating blow to a family.

The vast majority of prostitutes were born into peasant or working-class families. Although some girls entered the trade in order to escape parental alcoholism or abuse, others viewed the money they made from commercial sex as the only means of keeping their families together. Having often shared one small room with their parents, they were already in possession of a thorough sexual education even if they managed to maintain their virginity into their teenage years. 'Their demoralization was a gradual process. Most likely they would begin by giving away that which they would later be instructed to sell.'⁹⁸

In 1275 the age of consent for heterosexual acts was set at twelve and, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, this was lowered to the age of ten.⁹⁹ The demand for child prostitutes was inflamed by clients' belief that intercourse with a virgin was the only real safe form of sex or that, if they were already infected, they could free themselves of venereal disease by passing it on to a clean body.

The procuress whose own words supposedly informed *The Devil and the Strumpet: Or, the Old Bawd Tormented* (1700) receives violent visitations from the Devil as a result of her 'having been a Leud, Notorious, and Wicked Liver for many Years, and Bawd to above 20 young Women, to their utter Ruin'. By selling the maidenheads of these women, the bawd – named as Jane Freeman – raised such 'vast Contribution-Money' she was able to establish her own brothel. In the 1675 pamphlet *The Ape-Gentlewoman, or the Character of an Exchange-wench*, clients flock to a brothel after hearing a fresh face is due to arrive, 'as to an East-India Sale, and bid as fast for her Apprentices Maiden-head as if it were to be sold by Inch of Candle'. Once the auction has ended, the bawd instructs her new girl to deliver linen to the chamber of the highest bidder and, once there, comply with his desires.

Of course, once a new girl was known to have been deflowered, her price dramatically decreased. However, the maidenheads of many prostitutes were sold several times over. The subject of John Taylor's *A Bawd* (1635: 18) sells one maidenhead three or four hundred times. Procuring a girl who was a virgin was extremely difficult since most girls willing to work as prostitutes had already experienced sexual relations. In many instances, bawds satisfied themselves with providing girls they could convincingly pass off as not having been sexually active. There were several tricks employed to restore the appearance of virginity. Charlotte Hayes told the sexually eccentric MP George Selwyn, 'that a Maidenhead was as easily made as a pudding'. From the earliest times, astringents were made of boiled up concoctions of herbs such as myrtle and plantain and applied by women to tighten their vaginal walls. More theatrical deceptions included the use of a small bladder of animal blood to mimic the effect of a broken hymen or the employment of a sponge soaked in blood.¹⁰⁰

2.6 Prostitutes and sexuality in early modern England

In the early modern period, women were not only regarded as being weaker, less intelligent and easily corruptible, but as having much stronger sexual passions than men. Once a woman had experienced sexual intercourse, it was believed that she was forever lusting carnal pleasure and was vulnerable to surrendering herself to immoralities such as marital infidelity. Widows were particularly regarded as being controlled by an unpleasant and unbridled sexuality. In their study of oral culture, Mendelson and Crawford (1998: 62) show how women were stereotypically presented as less than fully human: 'Instead of being obedient,

pious, chaste, and silent as they ought, women were said to be insubordinate, hypocritical, lustful, and garrulous by nature.'

The existence of prostitutes appeared to validate this belief. As Amster (2007: ix–x) has commented, it was perceived that a woman became a prostitute because of who she was, not because she was pursuing a living. Prostitution was construed not so much as a profession but as an identity. The common belief was that prostitutes had chosen their work because they simply enjoyed having a great deal of sex with a multitude of partners. *A Catalogue of filths* (Anon. 1691: 2) lists the details of 'Mrs. Sarah H – th, a very black Woman, who has several times attempted to turn honest, but her itching flesh won't let her, and so is forced to continue a Crack in her own defence'. Such beliefs concerning women's uncontrollable sexual appetites gave would-be rapists all the justification they needed. Their victims, often accused of giving consent and crying rape as an afterthought, suffered additional social exclusion, while some had little choice but to start charging for something that had initially been taken from them by force. Edgar (1632) asserted that a married woman, or *feme covert*, had no legal rights distinct from those of her husband. The treatise should not be accepted as a true rendition of early seventeenth-century law but it does indicate how rape was regarded at this time to be a theft against the man who 'owned' the victim.¹⁰¹ It is possible that recent scholarship has placed too much emphasis on the social importance of female chastity, but there is no doubt that an individual woman's sexual history was deemed to be of great interest to her community and, once a woman had suffered a 'fall', her place in society usually altered for the worst.¹⁰² Moreover, the daughters of women judged guilty of sexual impropriety often inherited the social stigma that surrounded their mothers.¹⁰³

Of course, it was not only acts of rape that could permanently savage a woman's reputation. Some women consented to sex in the genuine belief they would later marry their partner. The story of the seduced girl, taken to London and abandoned by her lover, was not purely invented. Girls were sometimes duped into absconding to the capital with soldiers, perhaps driven by intolerable circumstances of poverty or abuse at home, but had their hopes of a respectable marriage dashed upon arrival. Saunders Welch, the former grocer who served as high constable for Holborn in the 1740s, described how brothel-keepers employed agents to stalk wagons and carriages for the arrival of fresh faces. Procurers also frequented register offices that displayed advertisements for domestic servants in the hopes of tricking new female immigrants into accepting bogus positions; it only became clear to them that their new home was a brothel once they had settled in. Marie Donnolly recounted being tricked initially by a

porter and then being lured to a keeper based in Clerkenwell by a gentleman from Norfolk.¹⁰⁴

Married women were sometimes persuaded to engage in prostitution in order to acquire financial independence from a disagreeable or sexually unresponsive husband, and in some cases prostitution was the family business with the husband not only being aware of his wife's activities but actively seeking clients for her. A pamphlet of 1608 detailed the exploits of Margaret Ferneseed who was burnt to death for murdering her husband. Ferneseed admitted procuring married women who were dissatisfied with their home lives, persuading them that 'they were not beloved of their husbands', or that 'their husbands maintained them not sufficiently to expresse their beauty'. Of course, once these women had entertained their first client, Ferneseed could force them to continue by threatening to expose their infidelity to their husbands.¹⁰⁵

Foreign women were another rich source for procurers. From the fifteenth century onwards, the nicknames of some prostitutes suggest distant origins: 'French Jane'; 'Nan a Parys'; 'Spanish Nelle'; 'Christine that cam from Romanyn'; 'Joan Greke'; and 'Anne Ireland'. Occasionally, procurers were instructed by a wealthy client to target a specific girl. Rubenhold (2005: 58–62, 183–6, 263) recounts the case of a woman who went by the name of Charlotte Spencer, a pretty daughter of a Newcastle coal merchant with no dowry of which to speak, who caught the eye of Lord Spencer. Dispatched to Newcastle by Spencer on the payment of five hundred pounds, Jack Harris, a pimp, wooed Charlotte and persuaded her to elope with him to London. After their fake marriage ceremony, Charlotte and Harris retired to their bedchamber and proceeded to make love in the dark. In the morning, Charlotte was horrified to find that she had relinquished her virginity to Spencer rather than Harris and that, moreover, she had blindly walked into a new life of prostitution. Charlotte's experiences could have been even worse – there are several well-known cases in the period of low-born women being held against their will as a prelude to being forced into prostitution.¹⁰⁶

Despite a significant proportion of women being forced or tricked into prostitution, the majority of prostitutes probably entered the trade with some level of willingness in order to make a living. Some women, finding themselves between jobs, used prostitution to bridge the gap in employment. Others who worked found it impossible to survive purely on their wages so occasionally sold their bodies on the side. Disability was not necessarily a bar to supporting oneself in this way; Wunderli (1981: 100) gives two examples of fifteenth-century prostitutes whose physical disabilities limited their means of providing for themselves: 'Johanna with the one hand' and 'Bette cum yoldeforte [clubfoot]'.

In short, while there were doubtless some career prostitutes, the picture painted by Griffiths (1993) is plausible – prostitution was a ‘highly volatile milieu’: women entered and left the trade frequently and regularly moved lodging houses. Some women gave up prostitution on marriage; others were forced to stop working temporarily as a result of a baby that was carried to term. The life of Mary Knight, documented on the *London Lives* website, is typical. Mary was born in 1685 in Yarmouth and raised by her uncle, moving to London in the early 1700s where she worked as an apprentice to a fish woman. After seven years, she established her own business in Billingsgate and married a seaman whose profligacy helped reduce her to poverty. She claimed she turned to prostitution to ‘keep herself from starving.’ In October 1705 Mary was sentenced to hard labour for being a ‘lewd person’ and a ‘common nightwalker’ and, the following month, received a similar sentence after first being sent to St Bartholomew’s Hospital to be treated for a severe bout of venereal disease. Mary Knight then disappears from the records for almost a decade: it is possible that she managed to evade the authorities during this period but more likely that she found other means of making a living. In 1715, a woman named Mary Knight, not necessarily the same person, was included on the calendars of prisoners at New Prison and the house of correction in Clerkenwell three times. In each instance, she was ordered to pay a discharge fee of one or two shillings and discharged. This pattern of leniency was discontinued after an accusation of theft in January 1716. Mary, and another woman named Margaret Hopkins, were indicted for stealing nine guineas and fourteen shillings from William Cane, a seaman. Cane claimed that, while under the influence of drink, he agreed to allow Mary to accompany him to his lodgings. Rather than take him home, Mary confessed to leading Cane to the Ship Tavern in Church Lane and, after he had retired to bed, robbing him. Both women claimed to be with child in order to avoid the highest penalty: pregnant women were given a temporary reprieve until their baby was born and, particularly from the Commonwealth period onwards, they often received a general pardon.¹⁰⁷ Mary was executed at Tyburn on 27 January but Margaret, having had her pregnancy confirmed, was spared.¹⁰⁸

2.7 A hierarchy of prostitutes

Most histories which focus on early modern prostitution restrict their study to London, probably because contemporary writers provided very few details about commercial sex outside of the capital.¹⁰⁹ Prostitution did take place throughout

England, however, and is documented accordingly in archival records in areas such as crime, apprenticeships and poor relief. Officials in Norwich, England's second largest city in the period, attempted to close its many brothels in 1668 and 1681 without success. Prostitutes were also identified as working in Leith near Edinburgh and the town of Deal in Kent in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries respectively.¹¹⁰ It does appear that the experiences of the rural prostitute differed from that of her urban counterpart. The rural prostitute was more likely to operate on a casual and opportunistic basis. She might work primarily as a barmaid in the village alehouse or be a wandering vagrant, soliciting male villagers as she passed through the community following the route of a travelling fair or market. Quaife (1979: 150–3) has discussed how some vagrant females accompanied one man on a journey for weeks at a time, passing themselves off as wives, until they teamed up with another traveller. Other prostitutes were passed between the members of a small group such as the clergy of the diocese. Another type of village whore operated discreetly from her home and accepted payment in the form of work such as milking or harvesting; she was sometimes a widow and, although a source of ready gossip, tended to be tolerated by the authorities.¹¹¹

Some prostitutes working in London did not differ a great deal from their rural counterparts in their scope and methods but others considered themselves to be professional, full-time whores.¹¹² Perhaps the most obvious disparities in the experiences of prostitutes can be attributed to the category of whore to which a woman belonged. We have already examined the lifestyle of the courtesan who perched precariously at the top of the prostitution rank hierarchy but it is essential to understand the way of life of prostitutes lower down the pecking order: the whore operating from the relative safety of a brothel; those renting a room in a lodging house; and the bottom of the heap streetwalker conducting business out of doors. Very little is known about another type of prostitute, the outwardly respectable woman conducting business on a clandestine basis, perhaps from her own home.

Even contemporaries struggled to differentiate between properties that operated as brothels and those that housed tenant prostitutes who worked independently and this confusion is reflected in official records. Bridewell records have provided historians with a much greater depth of knowledge about prostitutes who worked in bawdy houses than those at the lower end of the market, enabling a clearer picture to emerge of the location of such places, brothel owners and their degree of collaboration with one another, and the involvement of pimps. Literary accounts such as John Dunton's monthly

series, *The Night Walker*, also give a wealth of information on the activities of London prostitutes and suggest, in their descriptions of savvy madams and their comfortable houses of disrepute, an impressive level of organization.

Alongside the well-known courtesans living in fine private dwellings, other women of superior education and high fashion were also available for a high price. Some women discreetly advertised themselves as being in search of a companion but the most sought-after were the 'commonwealth of ladies' who entertained clients for agreed lengths of time, often long term. These consorts were members of a loose society, sometimes meeting to swap knowledge, and often making contact with new customers in converted manor houses or smarter inns in places such as Pall Mall, Hatton Garden and Saint James Street. Many of these high-end prostitutes operated from private dwellings but others rented rooms in luxurious pleasure houses or paid madams in private brothels to introduce them to suitable clients. Having a vested interest in mirroring themselves on ladies of respectable society, these ladies of fashion were careful to avoid haunts frequented by lower-class prostitutes and instead favoured Covent Garden addresses. Their clients were always wealthy and sometimes possessed a political influence that could protect them from any unwanted interest by the authorities. Some women worked in league with a number of hangers-on, such as procurers, male protectors or bullies, and negotiators who spread animated reports of their skills (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4.5 which discusses the near synonymy of the terms *pimp* and *bawd*). High-class prostitutes working on a part-time basis for the more superior establishments have been referred to as 'ape-gentlewomen' but this term does not feature in the EEBO corpus.¹¹³ These women behaved like ladies and, despite exchanging sexual favours for money, preferred not to be classed as professional prostitutes. Meanwhile, *pensionary misses*, a name used in *The Night Walker* and *The Female Fire-Ships* but which does not appear elsewhere in the EEBO corpus, made contact with their customers in affluent areas but were not full-time prostitutes and resided at a distance from the popular soliciting streets.¹¹⁴

2.7.1 Bawds and bawdy houses

The depiction of bawds in contemporary literature is, to say the least, unflattering. One can almost guarantee that the bawd will be female, haggish and utterly immoral. In *A Bawd*, Taylor describes his subject as having been deserted by whoring before she was willing to leave it and, with an underlying suggestion of

her brutality, taking great pains to style country girls in a manner appropriate for a whorehouse:

She casts and hammers her wenches into all fashions; she hath them burnished, polish'd, punsh'd and turn'd, and if any of them by a fall, or too much heat bee bruish'd, crack'd, or broken, shee can soder them together againe, and make them marketable.

Taylor highlights the double standard in popular attitudes towards his bawd: she is an object of contempt while drunkards, villains and other wretches are embraced. She does not care for any man but can ingratiate herself with people of all 'nations, degrees, conditions, mysteries and occupations', providing they can pay for her girls' services. Her finest characteristic is her discretion. The Bawd is brimming with friendly toleration and charity because 'her whole trade and course of life is to hide and cover the faults of the greatest offenders.'¹¹⁵

The anonymous pamphlet *The Devil and the Strumpet: Or, the Old Bawd Tormented* (Anon. 1700) renders Taylor's musings rather flattering by comparison. This bawd, named Jane Freeman, can no longer make a living as a 'Hackney Jilt' because her clients think her 'not worth throwing their Legs o'er' so takes up the business of deluding 'poor Innocent Creatures, to satisfie the Lust of ungrateful Sinners, almost as bad as her self'. However, because she becomes so physically repellent to her clients, her business fails and she is forced to seek aid from the parish. In her new lodgings, she receives terrifying visits from the Devil himself, who recognizes her as one of his own, which culminate in him beating and hurling her round her chambers. The author provides graphic particulars of the manner and outcomes of the Devil's violence, including a description of the bawd's severe injuries and a lurid aside informing us that the lady lost control of her bladder and bowels in sheer terror.

In reality, female bawds demonstrated remarkable survival skills. They had not only managed to avoid premature death during their years of prostitution, but they had actually managed to carve out a business for themselves in the process. These women did profit from the exploitation of other members of their sex and were unlikely to be bleeding hearts but most of them had no other economic opportunities open to them. Contemporary depictions of bawds becoming so haggish that they are effectively forced to isolate themselves from the rest of society are unconvincing. Most middle-aged Londoners in early modern England were, by our standards, probably physically unappealing but most successful bawds took care over their appearance and were aware that the better they plied their charms, the more money they would make.

As Chapter 3 will show, literary texts often depict bawds as being female – is this an accurate representation? The Southwark regulations governing official brothels banned unmarried women from managing brothels but Karras (1989) has shown in several jurisdictions between 1338 and 1544, between 34 and 59 per cent of individuals, as opposed to couples, accused of keeping illicit brothels were female. She believes these figures may be unreliable because the authorities, working on the assumption that men would be more able to pay a fine, were more likely to blame the husband for an operation run by a couple or even by a married woman alone. The role of brothel-keeper did hold a great deal of financial promise for women, who were largely unable to participate in other businesses, but many of these women were only managing houses owned by men.¹¹⁶ Keepers often managed more than one property and had no other means of making a living: Mistress Blunt, for instance, kept six bawdy houses, collecting twenty shillings in weekly rent from each establishment.¹¹⁷

By the end of the sixteenth century, pimps, themselves not tied to one particular establishment, frequently moved prostitutes around different bawdy houses to cater for demand. The prostitutes who found their way into the Bridewell records are usually referred to as ‘laying’ at a brothel and paying a weekly rent. The brothel-keeper would take a percentage of their earnings, often half of what they made, but sometimes seizing their entire income. In Head (1675) we are told of the ‘continual feuds’ between whores and bawds over the division of the ‘wages of iniquity’. In reality, both bawds and pimps made money ‘beyond the wildest dreams of day-labourers’. Griffiths (2008: 150–2) cites the example of a manager of a brothel near Aldgate making £100 in a period of three years. Pimps, meanwhile, could charge up to four shillings for their services. Some establishments made no use of pimps but others relied on them to secure clients of generous means. While many seventeenth-century procurers were female, the vast majority of pimps were male.¹¹⁸

One of the most important duties of a brothel-keeper was the protection of their workers from prosecution, mostly accomplished by blackmailing and bribing constables and beadles. Many of the higher-end brothels enjoyed immunity before the law by means of protection by powerful figures at court. In addition to recruiting new workers and managing difficult clients, bawds would also have a host of more humdrum responsibilities such as overseeing cleaning and washing, maintaining their property and ensuring the medical health of their girls. Many bawds enjoyed a profitable sideline in disposing of stolen property.¹¹⁹

Pimps offered a number of services alongside procuring clients, including protecting prostitutes from aggressive clients, delivering bribes to the constables and, if necessary, the magistrates, and finding a so-called surgeon to cure or, at best, to hide symptoms of venereal disease. The latter might also offer abortion services. The level of expertise of any medical practitioner from this time would compel a present-day patient to run for their lives: at best, the doctor was a conman who disappeared soon after taking his fee; at worst, he would try to do the job he was paid to do. Some independent prostitutes viewed their pimp with something akin to affection; it was not unheard of for a professional lady to be married to her agent or to regard him with something verging upon daughterly love. In a period when the rape or assault of a prostitute held absolutely no interest for the authorities, it is little wonder that some of these women viewed their pimps with a higher regard than they perhaps deserved.¹²⁰

While pimps were, for the most part, unpleasant people who frequently ended their days violently or riddled with disease, like the women they so readily exploited, they were themselves victims of a brutal struggle for bare existence.¹²¹ They probably did not relish showing deference to wealthy clients. Regularly fleecing clients in much the same manner as they did the girls appearing on their lists, as Rubenhold (2005: 55, 67–8) has described, was a perk. Pimps frequently double-booked prostitutes, having a girl excuse herself in order to satisfy a second client, while the first awaited her return in a nearby room.¹²²

Harlots residing in lodging houses faced challenges. They may have had the freedom to refuse threatening clients but they also had little protection from people who wanted to profit from their labour. As Burford and Wotton (1995: 60–1) explain, these women were overcharged by the legitimate businessmen who supplied their food while their pimp, procurer and the beadle took a great deal of the rest. The situation of those residing in a bordello was hardly better. Although shelter and food were, for as long as the prostitute was able to work, guaranteed and the girls living together may have enjoyed some sense of camaraderie, they were obliged to accept every client, no matter how violent or repulsive and had little choice over which services they were prepared to perform or the length of their working hours. Their most defining loss was that of their personal freedom: successful bawds were constantly suspicious and imposed strict restrictions on the movements of their workers.¹²³ Once a woman had accepted a placement in a brothel, it was difficult breaking free – frequently, even the clothes on her back were owned by the bawd.

New girls entering the trade were supplied with instructions concerning keeping their beds and their bodies clean and fragrant, dressing stylishly and learning how to conduct a conversation in an informed and well-mannered way. Bawds also carefully tutored their girls in how to give as much sexual satisfaction in as little time as possible and how to extricate themselves from difficult situations that might escalate into violence. The girls working for Charlotte Hayes received tutoring on carrying themselves in a ladylike style and were given music and dancing instruction. They were not, however, taught how to read and write. The intention was to maximize their profitability rather than endow them with genuine social power. The existence of lavish houses such as those managed by Elizabeth Holland and Mrs Cresswell overshadows the plethora of lower-end brothels that were a prominent feature in several city wards. At the lower end of the market, madams prepared country girls for their first encounter by washing their face with brandy and applying a heavy application of make-up. Even the girls based in establishments that were little more than hovels were taught how to encourage their customers to spend as much as possible, whether this be for additional sexual services or on other amenities such as alcohol, food, gambling or music. Linanne (2003: 19) estimates that in some of the poorer houses, the girls would be expected to entertain over fifty men per night.

At first bawdy houses were hardly distinguishable from ordinary residences but, during Tudor times, they came to resemble inns. On the ground floor there would be rooms for receiving clients, for dining, and perhaps a gaming area with kitchens at the rear. The first floor rooms contained the bedrooms. The constant requirement to be obliging along with long, irregular hours must have taken its toll on the residents of bawdy houses. Living alongside a bawdy house keeper meant prostitutes stood little chance of avoiding harsh discipline and were often obliged to hand over virtually all of their earnings.¹²⁴

Many bawds became famous in their own right. Let us consider one here, by way of illustration, Damaris – sometimes known as Damarose – Page. Her fluctuations in fortune illustrate how chequered the life of a bawd could be. Samuel Pepys, who often visited her premises on the Ratcliffe Highway, referred to Page as ‘the great bawd of the seamen’. She also ran a more elite establishment in Rosemary Lane for naval officers. Born in Stepney in 1620 as Damaris Addesell, Page seems to have spent her twenties as a prostitute and then a midwife and brothel-keeper. Like many women offering midwifery services, Page also operated as an abortionist. In October 1640 it appears that she married a man called William Baker and then, in April 1653, she married

James Dryer at St Mary Magdalen Church. On 7 October 1655 Page was charged with two offences: first, for bigamously entering a marriage contract with Dryer and, secondly, for attempting to abort the unborn child of a woman named Eleanor Pooley by thrusting a fork into the unfortunate woman's stomach. The bigamy charges were dropped on the grounds that her marriage to Baker had not been sanctified but the charges relating to Pooley could not be shaken off so easily. Page, no doubt being aware she could successfully avoid the death sentence by revealing that she was pregnant, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to be hanged. She then revealed her pregnancy. After a panel of matrons confirmed that she was indeed pregnant, her sentence was reduced to three years' imprisonment in Newgate, during which time she gave birth to a stillborn baby. On her release she returned to brothel-keeping, specializing in the importation and sale of expensive Venetian prostitutes who supposedly were greatly skilled in their love-making. Page died a very wealthy woman in her house in Ratcliffe in September 1669.¹²⁵

2.7.2 The wandering whores

Unlike the higher-end prostitutes who tended to establish longer-term relations with a limited number of select men, 'wandering whores' serviced as many men as possible and received payment solely for their participation in the sexual act. Some of these women plied their trade at fairs while others stationed themselves at the docks awaiting the arrival of willing sailors. Cock's Lane, by a law of 1393, had been the only place north of the Thames where brothels could operate with legal immunity. It was located in Smithfield and this entire suburb continued to remain an important hub for lower-end prostitution. Notorious streets included Turnbull (now Turnmill) Street¹²⁶ in Clerkenwell and nearby Pickt-Hatch (east of Charterhouse on Goswell Road), St John's Street and Chick Lane. In the pamphlet *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry sent after Lust and Murther*, Goodcole (1635: 14) provides a list of locations where 'harlots watch their opportunities to surprise men'. The first place to be identified is West Smithfield and Duck-lane end. He also names 'Smithfield Pond, and the sheepe-pens'; 'by the little conduit in Cheapside in the evening'; 'St Antholins Church¹²⁷ when the shops are shut up' and the 'Cloath-faire'.¹²⁸

The 'Cloath-faire' referred to Bartholomew Fair, held annually over three days in late August within the precincts of the Priory at West Smithfield. Burford and Wotton (1995: 54) note that the prostitutes working for one famous bawd, Mrs Cresswell, became known as *Bartholomew Babies*. A Bartholomew baby

was a carved wooden doll, usually without arms or joints, sold at Bartholomew Fair. The phrase only appears sixteen times in the EEBO corpus (see Chapter 4, Table 4.1) so does not appear to have gained widespread usage at the time. Moreover, although some of the concordances do appear to refer to women who are dressed in gaudy clothing, there is nothing in particular to suggest that these women are engaged in transactional sex. This conclusion is supported by the definition provided by the *Chambers Slang Dictionary*, which restricts itself to the dolls sold at the fair and ‘one dressed in tawdry finery’.

Smithfield was not the only place known for its high levels of prostitution. The characters Thomas Tell-troth and Plaine-Dealing in *Wonderfull Strange Newes from Woodstreet Counter* refer to a number of locations, including ‘Covent-Garden, Groaping Lane, Tower Hill, St Giles in the fields, Bloomesberry, Drewry Lane, Westminster, [and] Bankeside’.¹²⁹ *The Merrie-Mans Resolution* of 1640 provides an excellent insight into London’s red-light districts as its young author travels through them. He begins his journey in the Liberty of St Giles, a notorious slum that was later cut through by New Oxford Street, then bids farewell to Turnbull Street which contained many alleys and was densely packed with tenements reaching as high as four stories. The author passes through Long Acre, Drury Lane and Covent Garden and into ‘Sodom’. The last name did not, of course, appear on maps but it seems likely that it was in the St Giles/Long Acre district.¹³⁰ Our guide pauses in ‘Shore Ditch and Moorfeildes’ for refreshments and continues on his way to Ratcliffe Highway, home of Damaris Page, and to Rosemary Street, where the Royal Mint now stands. He then crosses over London Bridge to the bawdy houses of the Bankside and ends his journey back over the Thames, stopping first in ‘Luthner Lane’ and Cherry Garden, before returning to Smithfield.¹³¹

Baer (2007: 43–4), in research into London’s early modern retail history, has explained how the city’s shopping Exchanges suffered from shady reputations due to their connection with whoring. Indeed, in his expanded survey of London, John Strype (1720: Book 4; ch. 7: 120) tells us that the Middle Exchange, located near the Strand, attained the unfortunate nickname of the ‘Whores-nest’. Shop girls were thought to engage in transactional sex on a casual basis while professional prostitutes advertised themselves in the streets outside the Exchanges.¹³²

The whores plying their trade at the lower end of the market often rented cheap rooms in slum lodging houses; these houses were similar to brothels because every room tended to be occupied by a prostitute. The owners of these tenements frequently mistreated their lodgers and demanded a large percentage

of their takings. Some lodging houses also operated as taverns, with the owner taking rent and a percentage of takings from as many prostitutes he could manage to squeeze into spare rooms. Other prostitutes chose to hire a room in a 'night' or 'accommodation' house where they could take their clients for a few minutes or hours. Taking a room on this basis was often cheaper and meant that ladies in the trade did not have to live and work at the same location. Such rooms ranged from well-equipped and comfortable spaces with fashionable Hatton Garden or Pall Mall addresses to the back room of a tavern or coffee house where the business conducted was brief and perfunctory.

McMullan (1987: 125) refers to 'pennyrent whores' who lived in shoddy tenements that housed up to a dozen women at a time. The phrase *pennyrent whore* does not occur at all in EEBO but it does seem a fitting name for these types of prostitutes who often worked as a team, some of them sleeping in parlours and kitchen areas. They would typically make contact with a client on the street or in an alehouse and bring him back to their room in order to complete business. Living arrangements were unstable for such women and they regularly moved accommodation. At the lowest end of the scale were women who not only picked up men on the streets, but also carried out their transactions in courts, alleys and streets. These women might rely on a barn or shed as their only shelter. Dunton's *The Night Walker* makes reference to sexual activity in outside locations, for instance, the author witnessing 'Lustful Assignations' in Cupid's Garden.¹³³ Many prostitutes who had no easy access to inside space conducted their clients to one of London's parks.

It has been argued that there was greater solidarity among female streetwalkers than those working in brothels but the nature of independent prostitution meant that the former were competing for business against one another. Despite this, it is likely that prostitutes shared a sense of community, particularly when one considers that they were often the subject of condemnation by more outwardly respectable women and had most likely experienced a significant degree of unhappiness at the hands of men. Sometimes women who boarded together for protection and company were members of the same family.¹³⁴ Others preferred to live together in order to share expenses, such as rent or even the cost of a carriage, and came to regard one another as family.¹³⁵ Women who chose to live in an exclusively female household were objects of suspicion. McMullen (1984: 123) has described instances of young apprentices joining up with more experienced prostitutes in order to learn the trade properly and obtain an introduction to clients alongside a certain degree of protection. Such pairings tended to be known as 'aunt and nieces'; however, it appears that these particular

relationships were rarely based upon genuine affection, the younger partner being regularly replaced by a fresh 'niece' by procurers.

Streetwalkers' slang referred to the *game* or *town* while identifying one another with phrases such as *one of my cousins*; *one of us*; or a member of the *sisterhood*. A distinctive vocabulary that was a mixture of thieves' argot and vulgar slang has been attributed to prostitutes, many of whom were at least familiar with other sections of criminal society. The terms *diving*, *foyling*, and *lifting* were often used by prostitutes to mean pickpocketing and stealing. Customers were nicknamed *rumpers* and *dicks*. Prostitutes themselves enjoyed the use of aliases and often adopted fancy names like Petronella or Juliana. 'Fair Rosamund sugar cunt' was a real-life lower-end prostitute but more expensive whores preferred to title themselves 'Lady'. Mrs Cresswell, for instance, was often lampooned as Lady Cresswell because of her lofty social connections and political aspirations.¹³⁶

How much could a streetwalker hope to make from each transaction? In the 1590s Thomas Nashe described how 'sixe-penny whoredom' was common in the suburbs but gives the figure of half-a-crown (two shillings and sixpence) as the 'sette price of a strumpet's soule'. Ungerer (2003: 165) writes that the greater the sum invested in a brothel, the higher the fee expected by the brothel-keeper. Work-related expenses such as medical fees and fashionable clothing were taken into account. It was easier for a client to haggle over price when faced with a streetwalker with no keeper or pimp to insist on a higher fee. Dunton (1696, October issue) recounted how he successfully persuaded a whore to reduce her price from half-a-crown to a shilling. He was told that, in term time, a particular bawd would hear of nothing less than a crown but at other times, she would accept a shilling. By the 1690s it appears that the standard price remained at around two shillings and sixpence.¹³⁷

It is more difficult to estimate how many prostitutes were operating in London in the seventeenth century, particularly as many of these women were careful to maintain an outwardly respectable façade. Thompson (1979: 57) highlights some figures mentioned in contemporary literature: Part Five of *The Wandring Whore*, published in early 1661, lists 269 common whores. A similar publication, *The Ladies Champion*, meanwhile, estimates 1500 in 1660. In the same year, *The Practical Part of Love* asserts that a comprehensive list of names would cover thirty pages which, as Thompson (ibid.) has calculated, would make a total of 3600. The population of London had reached over 350,000 by this time. The magistrate Saunders Welch rather conservatively estimates that, by 1758, over

3000 women were working as prostitutes in London from a rapidly expanding population of about 675,000.¹³⁸

2.7.3 Places of assignation: Playhouses, alehouses and coffee houses

During the reign of Henry VIII many members of the nobility chose to downsize their household expenses and residences. A footnote to Thomas Dekker's *The Belman of London* explains that around 1580, 'Great men had the fashion of keeping no house and reducing their households, especially in the country, which led to a decay in hospitality and was a common subject to complaint among the workers because of unemployment.'¹³⁹ Rather than entertain at their more moderate living quarters in London, the nobility preferred to seek pleasure outside of the home. Accordingly, brothels, playhouses and taverns all prospered.

Goodcole (1635) lists the places where the prostitute Elizabeth Evans accosted men, in order of importance: playhouses, taverns, inns, alehouses, open streets, fields. This list comprises practically the entirety of the city, but it is significant that playhouses and drinking establishments top the list.

By the late sixteenth century, the London playhouses were a major venue for prostitution. Playwrights such as Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton and Robert Greene frequented the stews and their writing provides rich information about the lives of prostitutes, confidence-tricksters, thieves and bawds. Many of the most eminent theatre-owners, including Philip Henslowe and Edward Alleyn, shared ownership of nearby brothels, effectively operating as pimps.¹⁴⁰ The public theatres usually charged a penny entrance fee, which meant that they were a viable entertainment option for most Londoners.¹⁴¹ John Taylor, the self-proclaimed 'water poet', reported that three or four thousand people were being carried over to watch the plays on the Bankside every day.¹⁴² Audiences did not sit in respectful silence during performances: if they enjoyed a production, they would yell their approval; if not, the unfortunate actors might get hissed at or bombarded with the fruit that was sold as refreshments. The content of the plays was designed to satisfy such a rowdy crowd: Ben Jonson admitted in 1607 that 'now, especially in drama, or, as they term it, stage poetry, nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all license of offence to God and man is practised. ... Foul and unwashed bawdry is now made the food of the scene.'¹⁴³ Other audience members had little interest in the production: they came to the playhouse to see or be seen, to socialize and gossip with their friends and, in the case of whores, to pick up clients.

In *The Female Fire-Ships: A Satyr Against Whoring* by Ames (1691a: 8), the connection between playhouses and prostitution is made most explicit:

The *Play-house* is their Place of Traffick, where
 Nightly they sit, to sell their *Rotten Ware*;
 Tho' done in silence and without a Cryer,
 Yet he that bids the most, is still the Buyer;
 For while he nibbles at her *Am'rous Trap*,
 She gets the *Mony*, but he gets the *Clap*.

While some actresses were available to those who could afford them, orange sellers – girls who provided refreshments – also acted as intermediaries between whores and clients and were often ready to sell their own bodies for a modest price. The most famous former orange girl was Nell Gwyn, who bore two sons of King Charles II. Whores also made up a significant proportion of the audience. Just as the richer members of the crowd patronized the pit and middle gallery, the whores able to demand the highest prices frequented the best seats while the common strumpets jostled with the hoi polloi in the upper gallery. Even picking up the cheapest whore at a playhouse would probably have been a more expensive venture than using a brothel or side street venue because the woman would have passed on the cost of her admission to her client.¹⁴⁴

Plays promoted an alternative morality where the exploits of thieves and prostitutes were celebrated while members of the respectable upper class were ridiculed. Many young men and women received much of their knowledge about sex and politics at the playhouse.¹⁴⁵ The City Fathers argued that plays encouraged the truancy and corruption of apprentices and provided cover for whores and thieves. In 1597 the troupe of actors, Pembroke's Men, staged Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson's play *Isle of Dogs*. The Privy Council deemed the performance so offensive that Jonson was imprisoned and the Swan Theatre's licence was revoked.¹⁴⁶ It continued to operate without a licence until February of the following year but only held irregular performances.

Puritan critics were irked by the practice of actors impersonating female characters but found the presence of real women on stage utterly intolerable. In 1629 an audience watching a performance by a French travelling company showed its displeasure by hissing at the actresses.¹⁴⁷ In August 1660 a royal warrant gave permission for women to perform onstage and thus launched a new female profession. The first actresses were risk-takers with an admirable ability to manage hecklers and improvise on the spot and they inspired a series of plays about lascivious and wanton women. Fraser (1984: 419–23)

claims that many of these new actresses came from the high ranks: acting prerequisites such as singing and dancing were also considered part of a young lady's education. The financial rewards of acting were decidedly poor so it is little wonder that many attractive women used the stage as a means of securing a rich admirer.

There is actually little evidence to suggest that many early English actresses also operated as prostitutes and it appears that most of them viewed themselves as respectable professionals. However, in a list of eighty Restoration actresses compiled by Wilson (1958), three-quarters of them were judged to have had sordid private lives, either being mistresses of one man or selling their body to whoever could afford it. Certainly, there was pressure on actresses to market their sexuality: Romack (2009: 12) has argued that after the warrant of 1660, the biggest draw for audiences was the 'whorish performativity' of the actress.

That some respectable ladies and gentlemen avoided the playhouses was a source of merriment for those who preferred an edgier way of life. In the mid-1600s a number of petitions from groups of women were delivered to Parliament demanding, above all, the end of religious disputes. Henry Neville, the republican author best known for his dystopian desert island novel, *The Isle of Pines*, satirized such petitions in three pamphlets: *The parliament of ladies* and *The ladies, a second time, assembled in Parliament* in 1647 and *Newes from the exchange, or, the common-wealth of ladies* in 1650. In these libels Neville pretended to be leading ladies of the royalist court; in his second satire the ladies vote, among other things, in favour of a motion for 'putting down of playes'.¹⁴⁸

Unsurprisingly, most Puritans found the stage to be utterly without merit. Phillip Stubbes declared, 'The blessed word of GOD is to be handled, reuerently, gravely, and sagely, with veneration to the glorious Majestie of God ... and not scoffingly, flowtingly and iybingly, as it is vpon stages in Playes & Enterludes'.¹⁴⁹ In September 1642 the Puritan Parliament issued an ordinance suppressing all plays. In 1647 this extended to having all playhouses demolished and any person attending a play being fined. Many actors were whipped at the cart tails – in other words, they were tied by the hands to the back of a cart and were whipped as it travelled along. This ban was conscientiously imposed until the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 but clandestine performances continued in private houses so long as the actors could evade prosecution.

For the clients of prostitutes, purchasing sex formed part of a wider array of leisure choices. Indeed, most of the time a client spent with a whore was probably taken up with chatting, drinking and eating rather than directly engaging in sexual relations. Seventeenth-century commercial sex was a social

pastime and thrived in a number of places where men and women congregated: alehouses, taverns, coffee houses and gaming houses alongside playhouses. Many inns and hostelries eventually became brothels; these establishments had never provided their customers with privacy and most travellers opted to sleep in the nude. Bear-baiting, bull-fighting and cock-fighting were all considered forms of entertainment and, where crowds congregated, prostitutes found business.¹⁵⁰ Maddern (2012: 59) has referenced a number of inns, in London, Rochester and Greenwich, that had shady reputations connected with sexual immorality. She believes that women with illegitimate offspring may have found it easier to obtain employment in inns than in private households and that, in some cases, domestic staff working at inns worked partly as servants and partly as prostitutes. As early as 1499, the inn-keepers of the 'Cornish Chough' in Greenwich, Roger and Alice Buclande, were accused of arranging transactions between their servant Elizabeth and customers.

City houses of magnates were frequently converted into taverns, bowling alleys or gaming establishments. In September 1618 the Privy Council informed the Lord Mayor that there were now over four hundred taverns open in the City of London. The clientele of alehouses appears to have been less socially respectable than those who patronized taverns. John Earle remarked that a tavern was 'a pair of stairs above an Alehouse, where men are drunk with more credit and apology'. In London the distinction seems to have been one of social class in the sense that wine was more expensive than ale or beer. Gambling with dice or cards often took place within alehouses and some establishments even accommodated an illegal bowling alley within their parameters.¹⁵¹ Clark (1983a: 145–8) shows that, at the start of the seventeenth century, wary commentators responded to the growth of alehouses with alarm, believing that they were centres of political opposition, crime and sexual vice. Some alehouse-keepers certainly deserved their reputations as receivers of stolen goods or as harbourers of known criminals. Thieves, meanwhile, found alehouses to be useful places in which to plot their next venture or divvy up the ill-gotten gains of their last. However, in the vast majority of cases, those alehouse owners who acted illegally were not organized criminals but amateur opportunists. Allegations that alehouses posed a threat to family life and social respectability in general perhaps warrant a greater degree of scrutiny. Drinking establishments provided a place where people could meet, away from their families or masters, to gossip, brawl or take part in an illicit liaison. For younger males in particular, the alehouse lent a sense of escape from routines which were frequently based on social inequality, repression and poverty.¹⁵²

Prostitutes spent a great deal of time in alehouses, picking up clients and socializing for their own entertainment. Many were alcoholics themselves or found it required less effort to arouse the interests of a man if he also happened to be drunk. Clark (1983a: 235–6) argues that in early seventeenth-century London, most instances of commercial sex that took place within the alehouse did not form part of a highly organized business led by the owner, but were casual encounters by non-professionals such as maids, female lodgers or even the wife of the landlord. However, as the century progressed, the professional alehouse whore had become a more recognizable figure, perhaps because legislation targeting the stews meant more women of easy virtue chose to operate from drinking establishments or, more simply, because a growing number of migrant labourers meant higher demand for their services. Interestingly, after the Restoration, Clark (*ibid.*) notes that references to prostitution and other kinds of sexual activity in an alehouse setting became less common and most related to shabbier and more old-fashioned establishments. He believes this may have been because organized brothels were taking the trade of the alehouse whore and that some victuallers worried about prostitutes operating on their premises. Those who had dabbled in prostitution on an opportunistic basis may have moved away from the trade altogether: the spread of consumer industries and trades meant they had wider economic opportunities available to them.

The coffee house was another establishment that came to have strong connections with prostitution. In 1652 the first coffee house was established in London's St Michael's Alley, off Cornhill, by Pasqua Rosee, a native of Smyrna. Such was its popularity that, by the end of the century, there were around 2000 coffee houses. For Londoners, coffee houses provided an important gathering place where patrons could read the latest newspapers and pamphlets, exchange ideas and discuss current affairs. The London coffee houses acquired a specialist clientele depending on their location: for instance, those situated around the Royal Exchange were frequented by businessmen while politicians congregated in those located in Westminster. Not all coffee houses were places of respectability and learning; they were sometimes frequented by highwaymen or robbers who carefully listened for tips regarding whom to target next. Other low-class establishments were simply houses of assignation or rapidly devolved into fronts for whorehouses. Tom and Moll King's coffee house, running the length of one side of the arcade known as the Piazza, was one of the most well-known establishments of the 1720s and 1730s and attracted a more fashionable class of whore.¹⁵³

2.8 The consequences of prostitution

Normally, the longer we stay in a job, the greater our expectation of a good salary, high level of regard and a reasonable pension pot. For early modern prostitutes, this was seldom the case. Thompson (1979: 62–3) has noted that although there were cases of prostitutes managing to save sufficient funds to open their own bawdy house or tavern, or managing to persuade a lover to purchase a lease on a property for them, it was more usual for a prostitute to head downhill all the way in the profession. *The Catalogue of Jilts* includes an entry for Mrs VV-----by, ‘formerly Miss to Col. S-----field in Ireland’, who used to regularly refuse the offer of five guineas for her services, but who is now willing to ‘take up with any ordinary Fellow’ for a mere shilling.¹⁵⁴

Alcoholism was a common occupational disease of prostitutes. The constant presence of alcoholic beverages in bawdy houses normalized their consumption and no doubt provided a source of nullification for women obliged to present an artificial façade to their clients. Streetwalkers, perhaps already heavy drinkers as a result of time spent in brothels, might understandably turn to alcohol as a means of comfort. *The Catalogue of Jilts* informs its readership that Mrs Eliz. B-----w is modest and pleasant enough until she has consumed her third bottle. Meanwhile, Mrs Dorothy R-----t, red-faced from drinking too much whisky, ‘will allow a Man her company for a bottle’.¹⁵⁵ Just as present-day prostitutes are sometimes manipulated by pimps who supply them Class A drugs, their seventeenth-century counterparts were made vulnerable by their desire for drink.

Henderson (1999: 47–8) believes that most prostitutes left the profession by the time they had reached their early to mid-twenties, after which time, in most cases, they returned to poorly paid menial work. Some of these women became servants to more successful prostitutes or got married. It is difficult to estimate how many former prostitutes went on to make decent marriages but the low likelihood of them having saved much of a dowry must have hindered their chances. Once a woman was perceived as having started to lose her looks, it was usually only a matter of time before her days in the trade were numbered or, should an alternative not present itself, she was obliged to increasingly lower her price.

Those reduced to offering brief gropes in back alleys for a few pennies were victims of a life characterized by fear and suffering. Common whores endured filthy living conditions and were worn down from regular bouts of venereal disease and amateur abortions. Periods confined in damp and miserable

houses of correction meant that many prostitutes suffered from consumption throughout their adult lives. It is impossible to estimate the life span of these women, but one can imagine that premature deaths from disease, violence or even suicide were common. The ones who endured probably had the toughest attitudes or simply the better luck.

At a time when contraception was rudimentary, pregnancy was an occupational hazard and one that most prostitutes avoided at all costs. Contraception was more likely to be used by married women and the most effective methods were coitus interruptus, extended breast-feeding or sexual abstinence. There are very few references to abortion in contemporary literature which probably indicates the general disapproval surrounding terminations rather than their infrequency. Pepys described the king's personal physician, Dr Alexander Frazier, 'being so great with my Lady Castlemaine and Stewart at court in helping to slip their calves when there is occasion'.¹⁵⁶ In the *School of Venus*, Suzanne even more vaguely refers to her knowledge of 'certain remedies which leave absolutely nothing to be desired'.¹⁵⁷ These remedies probably consisted of various mixtures of herbs and powders, available from an apothecary, which could be used in a vaginal douche to prevent conception or to bring on a miscarriage. If such measures proved ineffective, London had a ready supply of surgeons and midwives who were willing to perform illegal abortions for a price.

We have already discussed how some higher-class prostitutes decided to make the most of their pregnancies by demanding an annuity from several 'fathers' at the same time but many babies born to seventeenth-century prostitutes were in grave danger even if they survived their own births. The anti-heroine in *The Character of a Town Misse* is a thirteen-year-old country girl engaged in sexual relations with both her father's labourer and his landlord. When she becomes pregnant, she has the good sense to accuse the latter of being the father and he promptly dispatches her to London, 'the goodliest Forrest in England to shelter a great Belly', in order to save his reputation. She proceeds to leave the newborn on the steps of the parish church, a common fate for unwanted babies.¹⁵⁸ In 1615 an order was issued 'for the finding out of Queans that leave their children in the streets ... whereof some by reason of the cold and lack of sustenance have died'. The very existence of this legislation suggests that prostitutes abandoning unwanted babies had become a common occurrence.¹⁵⁹

Humphrey Mill's collection of poems, *A nights search: Discovering the nature and condition of all sorts of night-walkers; with their associates*, of 1646 contains a section about a child who is murdered by its prostitute mother. He provides

a graphic description of the poor infant's corpse and savagely condemns its murderer: 'They're worse than beasts who do destroy their owne.' Wrightson (1975: 11) has written that in seventeenth-century society, infanticide was primarily associated with mothers trying to dispose of illegitimate babies. He examined records of the surviving assize files of Essex between 1601 and 1665 and found sixty cases of infanticide, including two sets of twins, drawn from fifty-three parishes. Fifth-three of the sixty-two children were described as being illegitimate and, in all but one case, the mother was accused of the child's murder. Most of the babies were killed on the day of their birth and by forms of asphyxia rather than by more violent methods. Infanticide of illegitimate infants was thought to be so widespread a practice that a statute was passed in 1624, 'to Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children'. Inherent within the act was the presumption that an unmarried woman who had concealed the death of her child had murdered it; the onus was upon the mother to provide a witness to swear the baby had been stillborn. The burden of proving infanticide in cases of deaths of legitimate children meanwhile rested with the crown. This law was aimed at controlling sexual morality as well as protecting the lives of babies: one section made it illegal for unmarried women to attempt to conceal a pregnancy.¹⁶⁰

There were other methods of disposing of unwanted children that drew less attention. Illegitimate children were often farmed out to nursemaids, usually older women living in filthy hovels, who cared for little other than their fee. Indeed, those who charged a one-off initial payment had a vested interest in the child suffering an early death. Susan Long, when given a child by its mother, proceeded to carry it for eleven miles in 'extreame cold frosty weather' without nourishing it so that it died. Another common tactic by a father, realizing he would be deemed financially liable for the maintenance of the child, was to give it to a vagrant woman, sometimes without the consent of its mother. In 1626, a Lancashire glover named Cuthbert Mason gave his illegitimate child to a travelling woman, despite a neighbour warning 'beofre yow putt yor child of a Begger in this cold weather digge a hole and bury it quicke'. The woman, Isabel Smith, already had a second baby in her care and agreed to return Mason's child after a fortnight when he had arranged for a better nurse. She walked to the village of Bretherton and stayed the night in a barn, feeding both babies with some boiled milk and butter. By the following morning, Mason's baby had died. It is probably the case that Cuthbert Mason knew he would be unlikely to see his child alive again.¹⁶¹ In the case of Isabel Smith, the second baby in her care was retrieved by its mother the next day. Those babies who managed to survive

despite the odds against them might have ended up as one of the abandoned children who begged in London's streets.

Frequent sexual activity meant prostitutes were vulnerable to contracting venereal disease. It remains uncertain when the first cases of syphilis appeared in England: in 1161, an ordinance legalizing the Southwark brothels referred to 'the perilous disease of burning'¹⁶² and the founding of the Lock Hospital in Southwark by Edward II in 1321 suggests that gonorrhoea and syphilis may have posed a threat to the health of England's population at this time.¹⁶³ The Lock Hospital ostensibly assisted lepers but many medieval patients who were treated for leprosy were actually suffering from syphilis. Later Lock Hospitals, the first of which was opened in Grosvenor Place in 1746 by William Bromfield, openly specialized in its treatment.¹⁶⁴ By 1836 this hospital had treated 44,973 sufferers.¹⁶⁵ London had four main hospitals in the seventeenth century: Christ's for the care of orphans and urchins; St Thomas's and St Bartholomew's which cared for the adult sick; and Bridewell which, as we have seen, housed the criminalized poor. With the exception of Christ's, sufferers of venereal disease might be treated at any of these institutions. Bridewell residents were frequently transferred to St Thomas's or St Bartholomew's and were then sent back once their treatment had been completed. It was not unusual for prostitutes to require treatment time after time.¹⁶⁶

Although the mechanics of infection were not entirely known, the connection between sexual contact and contraction of the disease was quickly established. In 1530 Dr Simon Fish, in an address to Henry VIII, complained of those who 'catch the Pockes of one woman and bear them to an other; that be BURNT with one woman and bare it vnto an other; that catch the Lepry of one woman and bare it to another'.¹⁶⁷ The most obvious method of avoiding syphilis was complete abstinence but, in an environment where sex was readily available, this proved almost impossible for many people. Pepys' diaries, for instance, contain many entries confessing his struggles to abstain from the services of prostitutes.¹⁶⁸ Dunton's *The Night Walker* (1696, October edition) described how one bawd offered to search her girls for signs of venereal disease in front of wary new clients for an additional charge. Prostitutes were frequent sufferers of venereal disease for obvious reasons and their clients often went on to infect their own wives. In the short broadside *A Satyr against Whoring: In Answer to a Satyr against Marriage*, published in 1682, the author condemned men who damaged the health of their wives in such a way.¹⁶⁹ He expressed the hope that men who frequented prostitutes died slowly and painfully before their final descent into hell. The last page of

the broadside, however, admitted that men were naturally lascivious and that, after all, marriage was rather tedious: 'That Name call'd *Husband* is of Terror full, The State Uneasie, Melancholy, Dull.'

Fraser (1984: 411) believes that, by the seventeenth century, venereal disease was so common that it had acquired a certain amount of social tolerance.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, many social satirists of the seventeenth century utilized the dreaded 'pox' as a source of humour. *The Female Fire-Ships: A Satyr Against Whoring*, published in 1691, warns its young male readers against all types of prostitutes, particularly the playhouse whore who is riddled with infection. Meanwhile, at the stews: 'Aches, Buboes, Shankers, Nodes and Poxes, Are hid in Females Dam'd Pandora's Boxes.'¹⁷¹ Other writers take the opportunity to warn men against venereal disease in a more direct manner. The final entry of *A Catalogue of Jilts* lists Mrs Eliz. (alias Betty) S____ds, a former orange girl who works at the playhouse, charges 5s. 'and a Clap she gives into the bargain'.¹⁷²

The fear of venereal disease hugely influenced public attitudes towards prostitutes. Bernard Mandeville's *Modest Defence of Publick Stews* presents prostitutes as 'dirt', having the power to contaminate men with a 'Seminal Weakness'. It is women, he argues, who spread venereal disease to men and not vice versa.¹⁷³ Preachers and pamphleteers regarded venereal disease as a direct punishment from God for immoral behaviour.¹⁷⁴ Many sufferers were acutely alarmed and bewildered by their ill health. Quaife (1979: 186) gives the example of a Sutton Mallet husbandman who was so shaken by his symptoms he assumed he was dying. Seeking help from the local curate, he declared that 'he had received hurt by knowledge of a woman in his privy parts and said if he might have help it should be a warning for him as long as he lived'. Rural communities tended to favour proactive measures in terms of isolating the carrier and issuing medical treatment. The inhabitants of one village coerced a man into fleeing after he had passed on the disease to his wife.

There was a wide array of treatments for venereal disease in the early modern period, and many sufferers turned to professional healers for relief. *The Prentices Answer to the Whores Petition* muses:

For why, so long as Rogues and Whores are trading,
The *Surgeons* will have work, who in such wars
Gain more by *Venus*, then they do by *Mars*.¹⁷⁵

James Boswell, the lawyer and diarist who is probably best known for his biography of his friend, Samuel Johnson, found genuine relief at the hands of a physician. His friend, the surgeon Andrew Douglas, recommended sexual

abstinence, fresh air and exercise and a course of medicine. After treatment, Boswell was satisfied he was cured of all but 'a gleet' which caused no pain.¹⁷⁶ Quaife (1979: 187) writes of a Wiltshire man who operated throughout Eastern Somerset so successfully that any male villager who visited the area was the immediate subject of gossip and rumour. Another man, after contracting the disease from a married woman, was ill for around nine weeks until his symptoms were eased by a physician.

From the beginning of the sixteenth century until the 1830s, sufferers were given mercury in oral doses, a vapour bath, or had it applied directly to rashes, scabs and ulcers. Patients who were particularly unlucky endured the pain and indignity of a mercury ointment being injected into their noses and genitals. Although mercury was thought to be effective, its side-effects rivalled the actual symptoms of the disease itself.¹⁷⁷ Other remedies were more inventive but were completely useless. In 1541, Dr Andrew Boord's *Breviary of Health* instructed sufferers to wash their private parts two or three times a day 'with white wine or ale or else with Sack [fortified wine] and Water'.¹⁷⁸ Many prostitutes believed that urinating as much as possible prevented syphilis, gonorrhoea and even pregnancy. Homemade treatments included the use of sarsaparilla, opium, walnut, ammonia, sulphuric and nitric acids and a herb that was made from the bark of trees from the guaiacum family. Treatments that were advertised in the press included the Lisbon Diet Drink, Dr Solander's Vegetable Juice or Leake's Patent Pills.¹⁷⁹ Some people believed that a diet rich in prunes provided a failsafe cure; it may be more than coincidence that prune dishes were frequently offered in brothels.

The eagerness of many men to bed virgins may be partly explained by their assumption such girls would be clear of infection. Moreover, as noted, the myth that one could cure oneself of syphilis by sexually penetrating a healthy person increased the demand for child prostitutes. The belief that sex with a virgin can cure disease persists in the twenty-first century: in sub-Saharan Africa the fiction that such an act can cure AIDS has furthered the spread of HIV, particularly to infants. A more effective – and less repugnant – attempt to avoid venereal disease involved the use of the condom. Condoms made from sheep's bladders were available in London from the late seventeenth century. They were not comfortable to wear and Boswell complained that they dulled his satisfaction. It seems that most whores, perhaps because of the expense involved and their clients' unwillingness, neglected to carry a condom but they did become fashionable in court circles. The Earl of Rochester published a pamphlet in 1667 named *A Panegyric Upon Cundum* which hailed the sheaths as a barrier to both syphilis and pregnancy.¹⁸⁰

2.9 Conclusion

There is evidence of prostitution in London from its earliest days as a city. Organized brothels were established by the Romans, with many prostitutes operating from Southwark along the line of the Thames. In later times, high-ranking ecclesiastics showed a surprising amount of tolerance for the commercial sex trade and, in some cases, were directly complicit in its operation. Legislation aimed at curbing the spread of the industry appeared in fits and starts, depending on the stance of individual monarchs and the advice – from their close circle, judicial leaders and reformers among others – they chose to heed. As the early modern period progressed, the numbers of prostitutes massively increased: upper and middle class men were able to spend their expanding disposable incomes on women who had nothing to sell but their own bodies. Although prostitutes did suffer a plethora of brutal punishments alongside some more moderate restrictions, no regency or administration proved capable of preventing the expansion of the profession in the long term.

The vast majority of prostitutes operating in seventeenth-century London were motivated by the sheer necessity of making a living. By the end of the century, there were approximately four women for every three men and many women from the ranks of the upper and middle classes, by choice or circumstance, found themselves without husbands. While many of these women preferred the respectable option of becoming a servant, governess or ladies' companion, some opted to be a mistress or high-class whore. During the Restoration, it was socially acceptable to employ the services of a courtesan and a wealthy man would be judged on the beauty, wit and fashion sense of his mistress. A small number of actresses used the stage as a means of obtaining a rich sponsor while the popular playhouses proved excellent hunting ground for stylish harlots seeking their next client. These ladies were often relatively well educated and had accrued sufficient wealth to allow them a degree of independence that was hitherto unheard of for an unattached woman.

However, all prostitutes were not created equal. It may be tempting to view – or, for historians, to present – prostitution as a free choice made by empowered women who wanted to take charge of their own destinies. Sadly, in most cases, the evidence does not support such a theory. The majority of prostitutes entered the profession with very little and left it with even less. High numbers of unskilled workers in seventeenth-century London resulted in a density of poverty-stricken women, some of whom were married, who had no choice but sell their bodies. Others used prostitution as a stopgap in their working lives, dipping in and out

of the profession according to their circumstances. Abandoned girls, sometimes the daughters of these women, followed a similar route, often making a massive profit for procurers who sold them to the highest bidder. Indeed, upper-class men viewed underprivileged girls as fair targets for assault which resulted in more and more women being pushed into the sex industry.

Some women working as prostitutes did so on a casual and opportunistic basis but others worked full-time, operating from a brothel, a lodging house or soliciting from the streets. Women who worked in brothels suffered a loss of personal freedom, being expected to accept every client while their fees were paid directly to a bawd. In contemporary literature, managers of brothels were depicted as physically repulsive manipulators only concerned with the amount of money each of their girls was bringing in. In reality, most successful female bawds were charismatic managers who expected the prostitutes under their control to take care over their manners and appearances. In the seventeenth century, a small number of individual bawds began to acquire personal celebrity and enjoyed immunity before the law but lowly prostitutes were far less able to protect themselves from prosecution.

Although prostitutes in lodging houses enjoyed a greater sense of independence, they also relied on procurers to secure them clients and pimps to protect them from the same men. At the lower end of the trade, women carried out transactions in cheap rented rooms, in taverns or grotty tenements. Wandering whores sold their bodies at fairs or waited at the docks for clients. Others completed business out of doors, in alleys, courts and streets, negotiating long periods of cold and wet weather. Life was particularly difficult for these women: they were vulnerable to disease and alcohol addiction and permanently balanced on the edge of destitution. A minority of prostitutes were able to use the trade as a springboard for more financially rewarding ventures, such as becoming a long-term mistress or bawd, but many women left the profession more broken and desperate than they were before they turned their first trick.

Prostitution cannot simply be regarded as a type of work – it had a ‘social meaning’ beyond the experiences of prostitutes themselves.¹⁸¹ Early modern women who engaged in prostitution were categorized and largely condemned by their society. In the next chapter, we will begin to explore representations of women who sold sex in early modern texts.