McEnery, Anthony, and Helen Baker. "Popular Attitudes towards Prostitutes." *Corpus Linguistics and 17th-Century Prostitution: Computational Linguistics and History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 91–121. Corpus and Discourse. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474295062.0007>>.

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Popular Attitudes towards Prostitutes

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will look at evidence from a range of sources, including the existing research literature, that indicates the attitudes prevalent in society at large towards prostitution in the seventeenth century. At the end of the chapter we will tie some of those attitudes back to what we found in Chapter 2. To begin, let us consider what a close reading of some texts in which prostitution prominently figures show us about the representation of prostitutes in the literature of the time.

3.2 The depiction of prostitutes in seventeenth-century literature

Prostitution was a subject that fascinated contemporary writers. An abundance of broadsides or broadsheets, pamphlets, sermons and petitions, journals and diaries, books and newspaper articles all help us understand seventeenth-century male views of prostitutes and women in general.¹ The spread of literacy during this period attracted a new readership that extended to tradesmen, merchants, manufacturers and skilled craftsmen. Pamphlets catered to a wide range of interests and some were so inexpensive that even poorer workers could afford them. Social satires based around popular news stories were plentiful, as were narratives relating to murder and witchcraft trials. In the late sixteenth century, a genre that became known as rogue literature peaked in popularity, which purported to describe the activities of a real-life counter-culture of rogues, beggars and prostitutes. The authors of these tales delighted in divulging the professional tricks of these social outsiders, such as cony-catching (thieving or confidence tricking), card-sharpping (cheating at cards and dice games) and

cozening (scamming). Although rogue pamphlets were regarded as an inferior means of publication and their content was often lifted from previous works, authors such as Robert Greene and Thomas Dekker were very talented writers who became household names.²

One of the persistent historiographical debates concerning rogue literature concerns the extent to which it accurately reflects contemporary lifestyles and circumstances. Earlier pioneering scholars such as A. V. Judges (1913) and Frank Aydelotte (1930) were more inclined to accept information offered by writers such as Harman, whose work is mentioned in Chapter 2, as a genuine anthropological representation of life on the outskirts of early modern society. Recent writers urge a greater degree of caution.³ Although even successful pamphleteers such as Greene made little money from their writing, we must bear in mind that writers were beginning to respond to the demands of their readership. Respectable people enjoyed reading about pimps, prostitutes and bawds and the notion that such salacious tales could be realistic gave them a gratifying sensation of fear.⁴

State censorship of printed works took place throughout the early modern period and was strengthened during the reigns of both James I and Charles I. As McEnery (2006: ch. 3) has shown, the primary motivation behind censorship remained economic or political. James I demonstrated a willingness to accommodate moderate Puritans who found sexual obscenities, bad language and blasphemy outrageous. Works that contained mild forms of 'lasciviousness', such as bawdy songs and humorous satires, were roundly condemned by members of Puritan pressure-groups and were often the target of official censorship and legislation. Translations of classical and continental works reveal the extent of censorship: explicit references to sexual activity were abruptly omitted or words were changed to dilute the meaning of the whole piece.⁵

Hughes (2012: 6–8) has written of a decisive shift in the 1640s whereby the numbers of publications spiralled and changed in nature, many tending to be shorter, topical works such as sermons and newsbooks. She explains that a prominent theme in these new publications was gender tension: 'One of the most basic ways through which people order and comprehend their worlds is through the construction of binary contrasts, and the female/male contrast is the most enduring of all binaries, with the male pole almost always seen as the more valuable or positive.' Sexual accusation and insult were increasingly used as a potent method of belittling political adversaries and political satires of the time were saturated in sexual imagery.⁶ Royalist pamphleteers, driven underground, must have obtained a consoling sense of satisfaction by

besmirching the reputations of Puritans who prided themselves on their chastity and moderation. The notion of women themselves voicing political opinions and, worse still, committing those thoughts to paper, contradicted the idealized version of the quiet, humble and obedient female which dominated popular culture. On the eve of the Civil War, however, women increasingly took part in political discussions and a determined minority began to publish mainly religious writings. As Freist (1995: 459) has commented, these women were condemned in print as being lewd, gossips or scolds.

In the mid-seventeenth century, there was an upsurge in obscene and licentious publications and some literature became markedly crude and brutal in the following decades. Thompson (1979) has argued that the growth in pornography cannot be explained simply in terms of a change in official ideology because the 'filthy run of books' had begun before the death of Cromwell. Instead, he believes it arose as a result of the absorption of Puritanism into popular consciousness: sex was now seen as something shameful and Restoration writers were duly infected with a sense of guilt that led to a blossoming of perversity.⁷ Restoration writers of pornography were usually more interested in revealing the political loyalties of their protagonists than in stirring a sexual response in their readership. It has been argued that publications such as *The Wandring Whore* and *Select City Quaeries*, while ostensibly being in the business of cataloguing London's practising whores, were produced in order to expose certain individuals who had purportedly sided with the antimonarchists during the civil war period. Unsurprisingly, before the last decade of the seventeenth century, most authors elected to remain anonymous rather than be subjected to libel action.⁸

Restoration society may have celebrated greater sexual freedoms and even permitted a tiny number of individual women public success as writers, explorers and even scientists, but it remained a highly masculine and misogynistic age.⁹ It has been argued that the position of women actually declined during the Restoration period because Puritan values, such as marital fidelity and mutuality between spouses, were disregarded. Certainly, women were presented as objects of contempt in Restoration literature. Writers operated in intimate circles and were writing for the amusement of one another as well as for a wider audience. They often used their work as a means of fuelling feuds or cementing friendships. Some works appeared as a response to others while many more acknowledged the existence of one another. Prostitutes featured heavily in many obscene works and were easy targets for the kind of uproarious and bawdy humour that dominated at the time.¹⁰

In the present day, the names of early modern fictional whores such as Moll Flanders or Fanny Hill are better known than any real-life women who were involved in the public sale of sex. However, as the discussion of the life of Damaris Page in the previous chapter showed, a number of whores and madams found considerable fame towards the end of the seventeenth century. References to active prostitutes started to make an appearance in 'ladies directories' such as *A Catalogue of Jilts, Cracks & Prostitutes, Night-walkers, Whores, She-friends, Kind Women and others of the Linnen-lifting Tribe, who are to be seen every Night in the Cloysters in Smithfield, from the hours of Eight to Eleven, during the time of the Fair*, published in August 1691, which lists twenty-two prostitutes by name. Some of the characters who appear in the salacious books of the Restoration period were also real bawds and prostitutes. In *A Strange and True Conference Between Two Notorious Bawds, Damarose Page and Pris Fotheringham, During their Imprisonment and lying together in Newgate*, two well-known madams gossip about the sexual activity in other brothels and establish twenty rules for Fotheringham's establishment.¹¹

Literature of the period delighted in descriptions of whores who were skilled manipulators and liars. These prostitutes were incapable of understanding or experiencing love but deceived their clients into believing they felt genuine emotional attachment to them. It would seem that the stock character of 'tart with a heart' that is easily recognized by present-day audiences was less familiar to their seventeenth-century counterparts. While slightly predating 1600, Thomas Nashe, the Elizabethan playwright and poet, roundly condemns prostitutes in *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem* of 1593. Despite Nashe having first-hand experience of being shunned by respectable society – he was viewed with distaste after having published an erotic poem in the early 1590s – he presents brothels as places of unnatural iniquity and whores as possessing almost witchlike powers.

The discussion of Nashe is relevant as it allows us to see how some of the attitudes in his work predated but were present through the seventeenth century. John Taylor, the 'Water Poet', worked as a Thames waterman ferrying passengers across the river. Living to the ripe age of 80, he published over 150 pieces of work, inspired by the characters and activities of Londoners around him. Unsurprisingly, whores – in his opinion, shameless and unfit to be seen in the society of respectable women – regularly strutted through his pages: in *A Common Whore: With all these graces grac'd: Shee's very honest, beautifull and chaste*, first published in 1622, prostitutes are damned as 'the Hackneys which men ride to hell'. Taylor is amused by the tendency of these 'vicious' women to take virtuous names such as Prudence, Temperance, Faith, Grace or Mercy.¹²

Amanda: or, the Reformed Whore, with its serious tone and moralistic conclusion, attempts a more nuanced portrait. Published in 1635 by Thomas Cranley, who claims to be a prisoner in the King's Bench on his title page, it offers a familiar tale of sin and redemption. Cranley's godly narrator spies on the beautiful and fashionable Amanda through her bedchamber window and quickly becomes obsessed with her. He proceeds to follow her around town and sends her letters, the last detailing his knowledge about her debauched way of life and demanding her repentance. Mortified at being thus exposed, Amanda immediately gives way. She confesses her sins and goes to live with the narrator's chaste sister and mother for two years of prayer and reflection before a fever takes her life. The reader gets the impression that Amanda must already be nursing doubts about her chosen profession to be so easily swayed by a letter from a stranger. Although Amanda is willing to change her way of life, the author's hostility to prostitutes is overwhelming. He imagines Amanda's fate: how she will be stripped and whipped should she face prosecution; how she will catch venereal disease; will lose her good looks; and be forsaken by her companions. Amanda is told that she is so shameful that her family must deny her existence and that she is to blame for other people's drunkenness, theft, destitution and disease. Throughout, one cannot escape the impression that the narrator is excited by his proximity to the elegant Amanda and derives considerable enjoyment from imagining the extent of her sins.

Rosenthal (2006: 18; 2008: ch. 1) believes that in the Restoration period, prostitutes were portrayed as insatiable sexual beings – pursuing a myriad of sensual encounters and enjoying the fine clothing, sumptuous accommodation and luxurious food that accompanied their lifestyles. They were driven by a desire for 'luxury, power, prestige and wealth' as well as transgressive sexual passions. The notion that these women were engaging in work and were driven by economic necessity did not appear until the first decades of the following century. *The Miss Display'd, with all Her Wheedling Arts and Circumventions* of 1675 provides a good example of a lascivious and manipulative prostitute. Written by Richard Head, author of the better-known novel *The English Rogue*, the story borrows liberally from Nicholas Goodman's *Holland's Leaguer* and centres on a wealthy Irish girl, Cornelia, who, growing bored with her life in the countryside, moves to Dublin. We are told that Cornelia is exceptionally beautiful but her external appearance belies her lack of contentment, her vanity and her haughtiness. She becomes sexually involved with the master of the family with whom she lives, and eventually becomes his paid mistress. After experiencing illicit sex with one man, she is eager to entertain other suitors: 'Lust is a Gangrene, and having once

poison'd a member, never leaves spreading till the whole body be confounded.' Cornelia is then taken under the wing of an older woman named Polyandria who uses her to extort a great deal of money from several men. Her former master agrees to a large payout when Polyandria threatens to leave Cornelia's bastard baby at the gates of his home. When Cornelia marries an elderly, wealthy man and tells him she is having a child, he realizes that the child cannot possibly be his as her pregnancy has progressed far too quickly. He is bullied into silence and, for peace, offers her five hundred pounds and a further two hundred should he die before her. On his death, the now exceptionally wealthy Cornelia decides to become a bawd herself, 'making others sins maintain her own'. Although Head's narrative is full of the usual disgust at the wickedness of whores, Cornelia's story ends with her victorious and completely unrepentant.¹³

A similar theme runs through the six-page pamphlet of the same year, *The Ape-Gentlewoman, or the Character of an Exchange-wench*. The satire narrates how a young girl comes to town in order to work as a shop apprentice, but becomes a whore at the behest of her mistress. The author describes the anti-heroine as 'a Beast in a Womans Skin, A Whore in Masquerade, or a trick the Devil intended to put upon the City', whose main occupation is ruining men. Again, it is assumed that the young men in the narrative are noble souls who have given the exchange-wench their hearts; she, on the other hand, is described as being totally void of sentiment. No sympathy is expressed towards a young girl living away from her parents and in the care of an exploitative guardian. There is no understanding that the mistress juggles more than one man because she is aware that her current beau might soon become bored of her charms and move on to another girl.

Also printed in 1675, the penny broadsheet *The Character of a Town Misse* described the progress of a kept woman: 'A certain *Help meet* for a Gentleman, instead of a Wife; Serving either for prevention of the Sin of *Marrying*, or else as a little *Side Pillow*, to render the Yoke of *Matrimony* more easie.' She differs from a regular prostitute only in terms of her limited clientele. We are informed that the Miss fatally bewitches a gallant gentleman into providing her with an annuity of 150 pounds, swearing 'a Thousand dissembling Oaths' of love while seeing two or three others on the side. Her ability to manipulate improves over time: she persuades a new conquest to settle on her an annuity of 300 pounds for life and then abandons him within the month.

The Town Miss is particularly dangerous to inexperienced lovers: 'She is a Caterpillar that destroys many a hopeful Gentleman in the Blossom, a *Land-Syren*, far more dangerous than they in the Sea: For he that falls into her hands,

runs a *three-fold* hazard of Shipwrecking *Soul, Body, and Estate*.’ She is forced to take treatment once a year ‘to Wash and Tallow, and Refit her Leaky Bottom’ but returns, as brazen as ever, having completed her therapy. The author concludes with a particularly spiteful taunt against his now ageing leading lady: ‘She becomes a *Loathsome* thing, too unclean to enter into *Heaven*, too *Diseased* to continue long upon Earth; and too foul to be *toucht* with any thing but a *Pen* or a *Pair of Tongs*: And therefore tis time to *Leave* her; For *Foh* how she stinks.’ It is perhaps unsurprising that these barbed comments roused a ‘defence’ of the prostitute in *The Town Misses Declaration and Apology* in the same year. The author reasons that it is better to enjoy a relationship of affection with a sparkling and fresh mistress than be shackled to a ‘dull, silly’ wife. This satire continues the tradition of poking fun at whores but its wit takes a gentler form: the mistress, it declares, is never out of humour unless she wants a new coach.

Thompson (1975) has studied *The London Jilt*, a popular Renaissance rogue tale at one time attributed to Alexander Oldys, about a merchant’s daughter who is forced into prostitution as a result of her father’s financial ruin. Thompson explains that the central theme of the work is the anti-heroine’s readiness to swindle and deceive. Her skills vary from faking sexual climax in order to hurry along her client’s own orgasm with the aim of getting rid of him as soon as possible, to pretending to be the sole mistress of one client when in reality she is seeing fifteen other regulars. Like the eponymous heroine in *The Old Troop*, the jilt uses a pregnancy to buy a £60 annuity from her main partner. After he conveniently dies twelve days after signing the paperwork, she takes another lover and agrees to have his child providing she is compensated with a large lump sum.¹⁴

In 1683 a popular satire was printed with the title *The Whores Rhetorick, Calculated to the Meridian of London And conformed to the Rules of Art. In Two Dialogues*, under the pseudonym of Philo-Puttanus. This was a re-working of *La Retorica delle Puttane* by the Italian satirist, Ferrante Pallavicino, who was beheaded for blasphemy in 1644. The English version of *La Retorica* is also written in the form of a conversation between an elderly woman, named as ‘Lady’ Cresswell and Dorothea, the beautiful teenaged daughter of a Cavalier gentleman. Dorothea is living an impoverished existence in a room in Covent Garden when she receives a ‘charitable visit’ from the haggish Cresswell, a real-life bawd who attained a high degree of notoriety. The older woman comes armed with the ‘fittest remedies’ for Dorothea’s condition, being a set of fifteen instructions that will allow her to excel in the art of becoming a professional

lady of pleasure. She offers no pretence that Dorothea must conduct herself with integrity and kindness, instructing instead that she must be willing to ruin a million unhappy clients before she can retire a wealthy woman: beauty and a charming mien are less important than a sense of cunning, artfulness and good luck.¹⁵ Dorothea, Cresswell urges, must pretend to spurn financial reward, be able to entertain multiple lovers with good conversation and fake both sexual climaxes and insatiability. Cresswell recommends caution, however, advising the girl to dress with modesty and behave with decorum and sobriety: her customers will respect she who respects herself. Despite the book including later passages regarding exciting impotent customers, it is seldom sexually graphic. Contemporary opinion considered it to be unacceptably lewd and its printer was convicted and fined.¹⁶

In the last decade of the seventeenth century, *The Female Fire-Ships: A Satyr Against Whoring* of 1691 presents whores as monsters who use their feminine charms to ensnare 'unexperiecd Youth'. The verse is spread over nineteen pages and was probably composed by the little known poet Richard Ames. Damned by modern scholarship as a man of limited talents, Ames maintains a tone of scandalized and righteous anger throughout, asserting that he is not writing for retribution over a personal injury but is spurred by the death of a close friend. While the kept mistress in the work swears to her lover that he is her sole beau, she is giving her favours to countless other men. If the client later withdraws his attention – and pension – the jilt will 'curse you to your Face'.¹⁷

As we can see, many of these works – which are spread over the seventeenth century – share similar themes: the whore of this period existed in the popular imagination as a ruthless and corrupting influence. Not only does she manipulate, infect and steal from her naïve clients, she viciously revels in her immorality. Away from literature, what attitudes to prostitutes were prevalent and how closely did they align with the literary attitudes? To explore this we will focus upon two episodes in the century where a wealth of material evidence allows us to explore attitudes by sections of the public at large to prostitution – the Apprentice Riots and the rise of the Society for the Reformation of Manners (SRM).

3.3 The Apprentice Riots

How did everyday Londoners view the plethora of brothels on their doorsteps? The answer is that, at times, they responded with violence. Hostility towards prostitutes spanned back centuries. In 1381, during Wat Tyler's Peasant's Revolt,

rioters set about 'despoiling the brothels on the bankside'. In 1449, rebels led by Jack Cade, looted London and burnt down all the bankside brothels and 'reviled the women'.¹⁸

Between 1606 and 1641 there were at least twenty-four ritualized attacks on brothels by London apprentices on Shrove Tuesday, their traditional holiday. Another more serious disturbance took place in the Easter of 1668, over a five-day period between 23 and 28 March, during which brothels in East Smithfield, Moorfields and Shoreditch were attacked. The 1668 unrest is sometimes referred to as the Bawdy House Riots or the Messenger riots after one of its principal ringleaders, Peter Messenger. The riot involved as many as 40,000 people, including artisans and servants and, most notably, apprentices and led to four ringleaders being hanged, drawn and quartered.¹⁹

Apprentices came to London from all over England and were usually bound to their masters for a term of seven years. Some of them were orphans or from very disadvantaged families and found a place with a master desperate for free labour; others had wealthy parents who secured their apprenticeship to a prominent businessman by means of a hefty donation. The relationship between master and apprentice was supposed to mirror a father-child bond but, in reality, mistreatment was not out of the ordinary and it was considered acceptable for masters to physically discipline their charges. Smith (1973) describes an array of horrific abuses by masters, on both male and female apprentices, documented in the records of the Middlesex Sessions of the Peace and of the Mayor's Court. Almost three fifths of London apprentices dropped out of their agreement prematurely which supports research by Archer (1991: 217-18), characterizing the relationship between master and apprentice as potentially highly fraught.

After the Interregnum, London became overloaded with an 'overworked, underpaid host of raucous apprentices many of whom were Puritan zealots'.²⁰ Sporadically employed and poorly paid when working, it is unsurprising that these apprentices advertised their dissatisfaction. Smith (1973: 153-8) has explored how apprentices viewed themselves as belonging to a separate order or subculture. There was a wealth of literature that both celebrated and vilified the apprentice while providing evidence that they assembled regularly; perhaps most importantly, these youths shared the experience of being both an apprentice and an adolescent. Apprentices viewed themselves as 'moral agents', prepared to protest in the streets in favour of Puritan reform or to target prostitutes whom they viewed as being dissolute. Seager (2008: 25-32) has argued that the attacks on theatres as well as brothels represented an expression of the apprentices' moral values which were shared by older members of the London community.²¹

The apprentices who took part in the 1668 riot received more public sympathy than condemnation. On 24 March Pepys wrote:

Back to Whitehall, where great talk of the tumult at the other end of the town about Moorefields among the prentices, taking the liberty of these holidays to pull down bawdy houses. ... And some young men we saw brought by soldiers to the guard at Whitehall, and overheard others that stood by say that it was only for pulling down bawdy houses. And none of the bystanders finding fault with them, but rather of the soldiers for hindering them. And we heard a Justice of Peace this morning say to the King that he had been endeavouring to suppress this tumult, but could not; and that imprisoning some in the new prison at Clerkenwell, the rest did come and break open the prison and release them. And that they do give out that they are for pulling down of bawdy houses, which is one of the great grievances of the nation. To which the King made a very, poor, cold, insipid answer: 'Why, why, do they go to them, then?', and that was all, and had no mind to go on with the discourse.²²

A number of satirical petitions appeared in the aftermath of the Messenger riots. *The Whores Petition to the London Prentices* of 1668 criticized the behaviour and hypocrisy of the rioting 'little boys'. Another whores' petition appeared four years later, in 1672 on the eve of the third Dutch War, called *The Poor Whores' Complaint to the Apprentices of London*. It describes the long-term consequences of the disturbances on prostitutes: they are dressed in rags, their rents are high and their clients have disappeared. Moreover, they are overrun with the pox because their Dutch and French physicians have deserted them.

Both Whores' Petitions are witty and callous and it is highly unlikely that their authors were working as prostitutes in London. Indeed the light-hearted tone of the petition somewhat diminishes the anguish the Messenger riots must have provoked in women involved in transactional sex. In John Taylor's satirical tribute of 1635, *A Bawd: A vertuous Bawd, a modest Bawd: As Shee Deserves, reprove, or else applaud*, the heroine meets the violence and prejudice of the Shrove Tuesday rabble with unending patience and reasonableness. However, it is likely that bawds and whores awaited Shrove Tuesday with dread and looked upon the wrecking of their properties and trade with real distress and frustration. The health of Damaris Page, the infamous madam whose brothel was destroyed in 1668, was much affected by the riots and she died the following year. Madam Page was aware of the possibility of being targeted by rioters much earlier; in 1659 she commented that 'she would not go on building new Houses with what she earned by being a common *Hackney Jade* and now the Oldest Bawd, lest they

be burned down.²³ Brothel managers, like the bawd in Taylor's satire, probably realized that appealing to the authorities for assistance or recompense would be futile.²⁴ Fouassier-Tate (2014: 84) believes that the authorities quietly condoned the Apprentice Riots in the belief that they guaranteed social order.

The first whores' petition of 1668 was followed by a reply in the same year, *The Prentices Answer to the Whores Petition, and a further broadsheet, The Citizens Reply To the Whores Petition, and Prentices Answer*. In the former, the apprentices declare that they were not responsible for the destruction of whorehouses but add that the prostitutes are not blameless:

You at your doors doe stand Poxed and Painted
 Perfum'd with powder yet with all vice tainted.
 You with your becks and damnd alluring looks
 Are onto men just like to tenter hooks
 To pull them in, and truck with such base Jades
 And so to make worke for the Surgeons trades.

The Citizens Reply to the Whores Petition, and Prentices Answer condemns both the apprentices for their bad behaviour and the whores, 'the citties pest-house' for making a living from sin.

A second set of petitions began with a mock appeal from the 'undone company of poor distressed whores, bawds, pimps, and panders', headed by Damaris Page and Elizabeth Cresswell, to Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine. The most notorious of Charles II's mistresses, Castlemaine was despised by the public for her scandalous sexual life, her profligacy and her Catholicism. *The Poor-Whores Petition* begs the lady to provide protection against the London apprentices, reasoning that she may be their next target. The author of the petition was rumoured to be the diarist John Evelyn who had previously denounced Castlemaine as 'the curse of the Nation', but this was never proven. Certainly, the petition infuriated Lady Castlemaine sufficiently for her to implore the king to pursue the perpetrators; no doubt she suspected the author was among her enemies at court. Pepys commented on the wide dissemination of the petition while Roger L'Estrange, the Surveyor of the Press, was frustrated in not being able to proceed with a prosecution because, in his opinion, any jury would be receptive to the petition's satirical tone.²⁵

A reply, *The Gracious Answer of the most Illustrious Lady of Pleasure, the Countess of Castlem----- to the Poor-Whores Petition*, followed soon after, ridiculing Castlemaine's rise and criticizing the crown for giving her and her offspring financial support. Interestingly, it slanders the archbishop of

Canterbury, Gilbert Sheldon, for his refusal to support a policy of religious toleration and his failure 'to declare the Church of Rome to be the Ancient, Uniforme, Universall, and Most Holy Mother Church.'²⁶

It is far from certain whether the author/s of these petitions actually took part in the Easter week riots or if they were just using the disturbances to publicize their own agenda. Scholars have widely dismissed the notion that the Messenger riots can be explained simply in terms of young men blowing off steam. After all, as Charles II commented, the apprentices themselves were well-known frequenters of brothels. Harris (1986) has written that the disturbances were perceived by contemporaries to be a political and religious protest against the policies of the court organized by former Cromwellian soldiers. Certainly, the rioters marched behind green banners, the colour associated with the Levellers, and there is evidence they targeted specific brothels, such as those owned by James, Duke of York. Pepys mentions the ire of the duke, who 'complained merrily that he had lost two tenants by their houses being pulled down, who paid for their Wine Licenses fifteen pound the Year!' The severity of the punishment for the ringleaders who were found guilty of high treason does suggest that contemporaries believed the riot was politically motivated. Harris argues the riots represented a response by non-conformists who experienced persecution in the years immediately following the Restoration.²⁷ The protestors, he believes, targeted bawdy houses because they were furious the crown was benignly tolerating the sins of whores while continuing to persecute dissenters acting according to their own consciences.²⁸

While some scholars, notably Mowry (1999: 82–3; 2004: ch. 3), have questioned whether the mob was primarily made up of apprentices, we are inclined to agree with Romack (2009: 1–4): there is no reason to discount contemporary reports, including broadsheets and legal records, which do suggest most of the rioters were apprentices or belonged to the working poor. Romack believes the apprentices were not simply motivated by a moral objection to sex as a commodity, but were instead lashing out with growing feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement on a group that was just as exploited as they were themselves. *The Citizens Reply to the Whores Petition* refers to the apprentices, most of them adults, as boys.²⁹ This apparent infantilization of apprentices mirrored popular fears that the morality of such youths was particularly vulnerable to corrosion from older female sex workers. In *Strange & true Nevves from Jack-a-Newberries Six Windmills*, the whores belonging to Pris Fotheringham's establishment get rich while ruining the young apprentices who visit them daily. These youths have no one to care for them or discourage them from 'unlawful living'. *The Ape-Gentlewoman, or the*

Character of an Exchange-wench continues the theme with its eponymous anti-heroine deliberately targeting apprentices as part of a master plan of revenge.

Respectable people feared that the influence of prostitutes would lead gullible youths astray, encouraging them to steal from their parents or masters in order to pay for sex. A real-life testimony of Fulk Mounslow, a client of a prostitute named Jane Harding, accused her of 'allureth and entyceth many yonge men to their utter ruyne and decay, not only in expendinge & consumynge their goodes & good name but also in entisinge them to such inconveniences that are & be abhominable & detestable before the face of god'.³⁰ Whether this was true or not is debatable, but Mounslow clearly hoped the Justice would be swayed by his words. Servants were considered particularly susceptible to immoral influences. During this period, the demand for servants was increasing and suspicion surrounded young women in service who frequently changed employer. Male servants, meanwhile, were accused of gambling and frequenting brothels.³¹

Prostitutes were often despised because they were deemed to pose a threat to the stability of the social order. As Griffiths (1993: 40–1) has described, the world of prostitutes and the pimps and bawds who kept their company, was 'a corrupt inversion of so-called conventional society'. It was believed that prostitutes avoided church and spurned family life.³² A husband who visited a prostitute neglected his own wife and betrayed his marriage contract; moreover, he misused money that might otherwise have been spent on his family and his home. Brothels, meanwhile, were perceived as places where unsavoury characters congregated.³³ In *Amanda: or, the Reformed Whore*, the narrator described how all 'honest women' abhorred prostitutes and became embarrassed at the very thought of their existence. He expressed some understanding that most prostitutes entered the trade simply in order to avoid poverty but presented prostitution as upsetting a social equilibrium established by God.

The notion that all women who did not sell their bodies despised those that did was bound up with the belief by some that the clothing of prostitutes should be regulated. This would not only make prostitutes readily identifiable but also separate them from their 'respectable' counterparts. Although the Southwark regulations did not attempt to distinguish prostitutes by forcing them to wear certain clothing, some medieval towns, such as Bristol, did impose a dress code.³⁴ Of course, when given the choice, prostitutes usually elected to dress as flamboyantly as their purses allowed. It was in their best interests not only to maximize their personal allure but also to appear as convincingly wealthy as possible. Burford (1973: 94) suggests that prostitutes aped the finery of wealthy ladies in order to avoid being pursued by beadles and constables, though it is

likely that any law enforcement agents were very much practised in the art of distinguishing those who sold their bodies from those who did not.

High-class whores sometimes wore coloured veils and masks. In *The Night Walker*, Dunton describes the typical attire: 'Hat cock't up, long wigs powdered, flannel shoulder cloak powdered, beau muff, perfumed gloves, sparkling rings.'³⁵ The poorer streetwalker also attempted to dress as flashily as possible, using paints, powders and perfume.³⁶ In *Amanda: or, the Reformed Whore* of 1635, the narrator lists the possessions of a whore. We are told that she adorns herself with 'Bracelets, Pearle, and Amber' and owns a box of 'counterfeited haire' of various natural shades. She uses glasses of 'rare water' to improve her appearance, 'dainty powders' for her hands and hair, sweet perfumes and potions to scent her body and breath, marshmallow root to whiten her teeth and paint for her face. The prostitute is obsessed with her own appearance and spends hours at her mirror perfecting it. When Amanda repents of her whoredom, she declares:

Here, take my clothes, and sell them all away,
They are not for my wearing anymore ...
They are for Ladies, and for wives of Earles.
Not fit for Strumpets, and for light heel'd girles.³⁷

Respectable ladies were advised against wearing elaborately designed garments in order to avoid being mistaken for a prostitute. Cosmetics, in particular, were looked upon with outrage and horror. However, the notion of women dressing in a particular way in order to be easily identifiable as belonging to a certain group extended far beyond society's desire to separate prostitutes. In 1285 the corporation of London forbade common women to wear silk or miniver (the best squirrel fur) in order to ensure marks of distinction between classes were preserved. Dunton (1696) advises tradesmen's wives who dress like ladies, with elaborately arranged hair and painted faces, to return to the simple headdress and apron of a good housewife. In attempting to emulate the dress of their social superiors, he laments, city dames earn nothing but scorn from true ladies and are a major cause of the nation's moral collapse.³⁸

Complaints regarding prostitutes also extended to more practical concerns. Sex workers tended to operate in the evening when most other householders were craving peace and repose. Indeed Cranley observed that prostitutes actively avoided going outside during daylight hours because they feared attack by hostile members of their community. He wrote that acquaintances were ashamed to publicly recognize such women while the latter were forced to regularly move lodgings or change their names in order to keep a low profile. At the trial of the

infamous madam, Elizabeth Cresswell, a number of 'hostile informants' living near her brothel at St Leonard's in Shoreditch testified that 'many Persons well-habited have resorted by Nyght as by Daye and have continued there Drinking, Ranting, Dancing, Revelling, Swearing and much demeaning Themselves as well upon the Lord's Day and Fast Days'. Neighbours complained that they were considering moving out of the area as their daughters and servants were frequently mistaken for Cresswell's whores. Cresswell was duly sent to the house of correction.³⁹

Shoemaker (1992) has explained how the social character of certain areas of London began to change towards the end of the seventeenth century. Richer property owners left the inner West End parishes of St Giles in the Fields and Covent Garden and moved west to the new parishes of St Anne and St James in Westminster. As the empty properties were taken on by poorer residents, the numbers of brothels and gaming establishments multiplied. The respectable inhabitants left behind were appalled by their new neighbours and petitioned the authorities in a futile attempt to curb the area's decline. Local residents around Drury Lane were bitterly resentful of 'frequent outcries in the night, fighting, robberies, and all sorts of debauchery committed ... all night long'. Those living off Chancery Lane admitted they were ashamed to share their address with friends because of its proximity to a well-known brothel. In St Giles, wealthy residents in the northern part of the parish formed a new parish, St George Bloomsbury, in order to keep themselves apart from the area's worsening reputation. Gowing (1996: 101) has commented that the harshest critics of prostitutes were themselves female while those commentators based outside of London viewed the capital as a centre for vice, capable of corrupting the most unblemished of newcomers.⁴⁰

Of course, those who profited from gaming houses and brothels resisted attempts to prevent the operation of their establishments. Justices of the Peace in St Giles in the Fields complained they were worn out by trying to mediate between the two groups of inhabitants. Although prostitution did take place in the east end, it did not provoke the same level of outrage from respectable citizens. Instances of sexual transgression were often curbed by neighbourly disapproval or smoothed over by means of informal mediation. In the west end, brothel owners and sex workers were far less likely to respond to community pressure and their presence was regarded as a real threat to the local area.

Local business people were probably more willing to tolerate prostitution because they were aware that the presence of prostitutes actually increased their revenues. When George Dorvel, of St Paul's Shadwell, arrested a prostitute and escorted her against her will to the watch house, one of his neighbours, the

baker's wife, told him to 'be very lenient with the person [for] you know we all get our living by these persons'. Landlords, meanwhile, enjoyed the inflated rents they could obtain from keepers of bawdy and disorderly houses so met any community push to eject such tenants with understandable reluctance.⁴¹ It is also worth mentioning that although many local inhabitants huffed and puffed about prostitution in public, they were diligently hiding their own forms of avarice. Thompson (1979: 93) has highlighted the hypocrisy of Pepys who, after criticizing the king's response to the Messenger riots, proceeded to enjoy a fondling session with a Mrs Daniel in his coach the following day.

3.4 The Society for the Reformation of Manners

As noted in the analysis in the previous chapter, in the last years of the seventeenth century, there was widespread belief that immorality was overwhelming the nation and a renewed drive to suppress all forms of sin. A moral panic gathered momentum in reaction to the supposed increases in irreligiousness and a whole host of immorality. In 1692 William III issued a proclamation against vice which mentioned blasphemy, profane swearing and cursing, drunkenness, lewdness, breaking the Sabbath, and 'any other dissolute, immoral or disorderly practice'. With the official support of William and his wife Mary, the last decade of the seventeenth century witnessed the creation of a moral police force in London. The SRM was a peculiar offshoot of the English religious societies that were primarily concerned with salvation of their members by means of adherence to a strict moral code. The earliest religious societies were private organizations whose adult male members paid a subscription and gathered weekly to hear stirring sermons and religious instruction. During the reign of James II, the societies made efforts to publicize their existence and arranged, for instance, for sermons to be read in churches.

In 1691 a former lawyer named Edward Stephens founded a militant version of the religious societies named the SRM which actively sought to rout out sin and prosecute sinners. The primary aim of the reformers was to save the souls of the wicked but, on a more practical level, they believed that the widespread adoption of a moral way of living was the best method of ensuring a stable, peaceful society in which everyone knew and accepted their place. Societies were founded in almost forty cities and towns, including Newcastle, Hull, Leicester, Bristol and Portsmouth, but they were always most active in London where the campaign originated.⁴²

The SRM was made up of a band of like-minded members of the middle classes, many of them Puritans, and targeted an array of supposed sinners, including those who drank, cursed, gambled and engaged in transgressive sex. The large number of branches of the SRM movement – London itself had several societies – meant that the priorities of its members were inconsistent. To achieve a successful prosecution, the law required only one witness and, moreover, this person was allowed to receive a financial reward and was sometimes granted anonymity. The SRM claimed that they had enrolled a workforce of between 150 and 200 informers from members of the public who mostly worked as skilled craftsmen. In reality, most of their convictions were achieved by means of information offered by a small number of committed informers. We should not immediately assume these informers were corrupt, however; although a proportion were no doubt stirred by the lure of hard cash, it is likely that most genuinely believed in the society's message. Yet the use of informers meant that the founders of the SRM were unable to control the number of prosecutions or the types of vice they targeted. The leaders of the SRM regarded insults that pertained directly to God, such as blasphemy and breaking the Sabbath, to be at the pinnacle of the sin hierarchy. In practice, however, the offence which was most frequently prosecuted was lewd and disorderly conduct. This might mean idleness, theft or vagrancy but was also the charge used most often against suspected prostitutes.⁴³

The SRM published an annual report naming and shaming those convicted which was known as the Black Roll. It listed the names and offences of every person who had been accused, even if they had subsequently been found innocent, and indicated whether an offender was prosecuted for being a bawd, a whore, keeping a disorderly house,⁴⁴ being a disorderly person or for pick-pocketing. The names of women always outnumbered those of men on the Black Rolls. The society prosecuted between two hundred and nine hundred prostitutes a year; in the year 1699 it reported that five hundred disorderly houses had been suppressed. Most of these women were summarily sentenced to the houses of correction which was a convenient and inexpensive method of justice. It was much more expensive to attain a conviction against a bawd because such prosecutions had to be conducted by indictment; in 1698 only four women on the Black Rolls were found guilty of keeping a brothel. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Justices sometimes chose to bypass this difficulty by summarily convicting bawds of selling ale or liquor without a licence instead.⁴⁵

Shoemaker (1992: 99–100, 106–7) has offered a credible explanation of why the society targeted poor prostitutes rather than their clients. He believes that

the Reformation of Manners campaign was a response to concerns about social problems such as poverty and crime that thrived in London and other large cities. A sermon of Josiah Woodward, a zealous advocate and publicist of the society, declared that idle people, in other words, those without legal work, were 'the shame, the burden and annoyance' of London and would threaten the profits and peace of more diligent inhabitants.⁴⁶ Some inhabitants of London initially welcomed the society as they offered a means of ridding the streets of prostitutes, beggars, street merchants and other disorderly people. The language used by reformers revealed how they associated prostitution with other social problems: many prostitutes were also accused of theft, vagrancy, idleness or disorderly behaviour. Meanwhile, the small numbers of men who were prosecuted for using the services of prostitutes were also charged with an additional offence such as drunkenness.

In its first three decades, the society published around 400,000 books, distributing large numbers free of charge. It is difficult to establish to what extent members of the public were influenced by this literature but, given that it was most likely used in schools and read out by vicars in sermons, it was probably difficult to avoid it altogether. The society soon went into decline: its publishing activity from 1721 onwards was very small in comparison to earlier years. Its last set of annual figures was published in 1738 and totalled a mere 545 prosecutions.

At the turn of the century, the society had already begun to lose support, both from the church authorities, who viewed the involvement of non-conformists with distaste, and the wider public, which started to favour less punitive measures. It appears that the ceaseless prying by society members had begun to irritate many Londoners and the use of informers failed to gain social acceptance. Information from informers was treated with suspicion, particularly if the informer did not live locally, and there were many instances of people being beaten or threatened for informing. There was significant judicial opposition to the society, with many Justices resisting, first, the practice of members of their community being convicted by another Justice who lived outside of their division and, secondly, the society's preference for stringent punishment rather than a more meditative approach.⁴⁷ SRM members were easy targets to lampoon for their insipidity and lack of humour. In 1700 *The London Spy* had already categorized members of the society as avaricious hypocrites:

A Modern Reformer of Vice; Or, A Reforming Constable, Is a Man most commonly of a very Scandalous Necessity, who has no way left, but *Pimp* like, to Live upon other Peoples *Debaucheries*. Every Night he goes to Bed, he prays

heartily that the World may grow more *Wicked*; for one and the same Interest serves him and the Devil. ... He searches a *Bawdy-house*, as a *Church-Warden* does an *Ale-house*, not to punish *Vice*, but to get Money.⁴⁸

It did not go unnoticed that most of the successful prosecutions were against those at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. Daniel Defoe condemned the society for persecuting the poor while allowing the immorality of the upper classes to continue unabated. Brutal punishments of convicts – whipping, for instance, was not repealed until 1817 – provoked more public disapproval than approbation. Occasionally members of the public would band together to prevent arrests by members of the SRM: in 1709 a society supporter, John Dent, was killed by a group of soldiers during a scuffle which broke out when a constable attempted to arrest a suspected prostitute named Anne Dickens. Advised by Chief Justice Holt, the court ruled that Dent's killers were guilty of manslaughter rather than murder. Holt concluded that the soldiers had reason to defend Dickens because there were insufficient grounds for her arrest in the first place.⁴⁹

The society's assertion that English society was in danger of being subjected to divine damnation was an insult to the work of the church and the crown. High churchmen regarded the SRM with suspicion and resentment while William III, albeit publicly supporting its work, was uneasy at the high number of dissenter members and even ordered that some meetings should be spied on and that the SRM be placed under investigation. Perhaps the largest factor in the failure of the society was a realization among its members that they were failing to have any real impact upon the standard of morality in England. Early hopes that England would become a sin-free paradise slowly receded and were replaced by the lesser aim that people would adhere to an outward appearance of respectability. Once such disillusionment set in, the days of the society were numbered.⁵⁰

One theme that has emerged in all of the case studies so far is a link between prostitution and crime – prostitutes were perpetrators of crime and were punished for it. In the section that follows we will, accordingly, take a closer look at evidence for what links existed between prostitution and crime in the period.

3.5 Prostitutes and crime

In moral discourse of the early modern period, whores and thieves were regular consorts and prostitutes themselves often indulged in a little pickpocketing on

the side. This construction of prostitutes as petty thieves is supported by archival evidence. We will look here at some cases from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by way of illustration. Our focus will once again be London, largely because of the wealth of evidence available for the city. Griffiths (1998: 221) has shown that in the London Bridewell, one quarter of women charged with a second offence in addition to nightwalking were accused of pickpocketing or some other form of minor theft. A client of a prostitute named Constantia Jones described, during her trial, how she stole from him: 'As I stood against the Wall, the prisoner came behind me, and with one hand she took hold of – and the other she thrust into my Breeches Pocket and took my Money.' Constantia, aged thirty but having already suffered twenty incarcerations in Newgate, was hanged.⁵¹

Another prostitute sentenced to be hanged was Lucy Johnson or 'Black Lucy', one of the many women of African heritage working in the city. In June 1779, Lucy Johnson offered to sell her recently deceased husband's waistcoat to a Suffolk schoolmaster. He accompanied her to a nearby lodging house for the purpose of completing the sale but was set upon by Lucy and several other women who held him down, ripped open his breeches and took his money. Lucy was tried and found guilty but her unborn child saved her from the gallows.⁵²

Perhaps surprisingly, in many cases where a jury was required to decide between the word of a suspected whore and that of her client, they chose to believe the former. The Old Bailey Proceedings Online provides a number of examples. Hester Quill was accused of pocket-picking on 30 November 1719, although her trial was not heard until the following September. Thomas Bugg, her accuser, described how he met Quill in the street and accompanied her to a little room in the Standard Tavern where he proceeded to feel 'her hand very busy about his Breeches'. He later claimed she had made off with seven guineas that he had concealed in his fob under his watch. He explained to the court that he did not bring his prosecution sooner because he was ashamed of being in her company. Hester Quill swore she had stayed at home with friends on the night in question and that she only knew Thomas Bugg as a neighbour. She admitted she had accosted Bugg but only after she heard his accusation against her and when his wife had insulted her by stating, 'I love a whore, but I hate a pick pocket whore.' It is impossible to say whose account was nearest the truth but, in this case, the court decided in favour of Quill and she was acquitted.⁵³

Similarly, Joane Lane was cleared of pocket-picking on 3 April 1695. Her accuser, Gilbert Mackauggel, described how she 'enticed' him to drink with her before stealing ten shillings and a ducatoon from his pocket. Lane, 'with the

most Solemn Asservations that could be' swore she was a poor washerwoman who had been forced by a drunken Mackauggel to accompany him that evening. Evidently, the jury believed her declaration that she was too old to be a whore for they duly acquitted her.⁵⁴

Sarah Martin and Sarah Mullenux, a young whore and an older bawd, were accused of grand larceny on 30 August 1727. Their accuser, Peter Cox, described how he and another man had accompanied Martin to the house of Mullenux. His friend had taken another woman into a nearby room while he was being entertained by Martin but afterwards he realized his watch was missing. He and his friend proceeded to search Martin but not Mullenux in respect of her age. An additional witness testified that Cox was a common whoremonger and that Mullenux's establishment was not the first he had visited that evening; she claimed he had pawned his watch earlier at another bawdy house. The jury decided that the prisoner and prosecutor were all 'Persons of a very bad Character' but, as the truth was difficult to ascertain, all were acquitted.⁵⁵

The website *London Lives 1690-1800 – Crime, Poverty and Social Policy in the Metropolis* has reconstructed the lives of thousands of individuals who lived in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century London.⁵⁶ While largely outside of the period we are studying, the biographies of three prostitutes and one bawd in the collection are of interest as they paint a picture that would probably still be pertinent for the seventeenth century. For example, Charlotte Walker, who was born around 1754, had a long career in the St Giles area as a prostitute and pickpocket. She was arrested twenty-seven times for stealing but not all of these cases made it to court. She made twelve appearances at the Old Bailey, eleven of which she was acquitted, while an additional fifteen arrests for felony were recorded in the sessions books. She was also charged with being disorderly and for assault on a number of occasions and once for being a vagrant. Her accusers usually described her accosting them in the street and taking their goods from their pockets; stealing from men while drinking with them; or accompanying them to their lodgings and stealing from them while they slept. Charlotte always defended herself rigorously and accused her prosecutors of being drunken and immoral. She was usually acquitted on the basis of a lack of evidence but in 1799, when she had reached her mid-forties, she was found guilty of stealing a silver watch from John Taylor. She had made the uncharacteristic mistake of hiding the watch in her bosom where it was found by a watchman. Charlotte was sentenced to death but her sentence was commuted to transportation for life. She arrived in Sydney in December 1801 and died there five years later.⁵⁷

Although we have highlighted a number of cases where prostitutes managed to gain a relatively fair trial, they rarely obtained any justice regarding disputes over payment. If such cases reached court, the judgement was almost always reached in favour of the client who usually counter-accused the prostitute of theft. Occasionally, if the dispute occurred in a public place, the prostitute might gain more support. Isabella Roe and Grace Weedon were apprehended in Drury Lane after a disagreement about payment. Local people gathered about the two women in order to protect them from arrest. In another instance, a man named Stephen Gathern stole a watch from a prostitute, Elizabeth Hammond, claiming that she had stolen it from his friend. Witnesses supported Elizabeth and advised her to charge him with street robbery.⁵⁸

A discourse linking prostitutes with crime runs through seventeenth-century literature. Contemporary writers provided numerous examples of prostitutes supplementing their income from the sale of sex by means of other types of criminal activity. Although such sources should not be regarded as a mirror on reality – their authors were, after all, in the business of entertainment – it is safe to assume that they increased contemporary prejudice against prostitutes and heightened popular fears of a criminal counter-culture. Some published sources claimed to describe real-life women and their conduct. In *Wonderfull Strange Newes from Woodstreet Counter* (1642: 1–3), the character Tom Tell-troth describes how he has just come from ‘one of the Damnable Baudy-houses, that this City affoord[s]’ which is full of ‘fresh wenches every Night’ who are ‘admirable Rascals, pure Rogues, blood-sucking Horseleeches, damnable Cut purses’. They will ‘picke a mans pocket and give him reason for it’.

The assumption that prostitutes were thieves was strongly expressed in Restoration literature. Two satires of 1660 and 1661, authored by ‘Peter Aretine, Cardinall of Rome’, a pseudonym inspired by the Italian satirist Pietro Aretino, make similar use of fictional dialogue for humorous effect but this time it is the whores themselves who reference their practice of picking clients’ pockets. In *Strange Nevves from Bartholomew-Fair, or, the Wandring-Whore discovered* (1661: 4), three gossiping whores, Bonny Bessie, Merry Moll and Pritty Peg, are joined by the Wandring-Whore. The last provides an uproarious description of how she steals from a client:

I spread my shrouds, vnvail my Cabinet disclose my secrets, and open the pure Linnen Curtains that hang before my chief Fortress, drink a Cann or two, smoak, sing old Rose, dance, and when the Gull is elivated, I lull him asleep as *Delilah* did *Sampson*, and then turn *Philistine*, tip his Bung, and deprive him of the strength of his Estate, so he rises when he awakes as poor as *Job*, thinking he

hath been in Heaven when indeed newly crept out of the Devils Vestry. marching off like a senselesse piece of iniquity, not thinking of his losse till he comes into the Fair, to lay out his mony in Bawbles for his sweet-heart, it may be in Gloves, Ribbons, Rings, Beads, Bracelets or other such like Fancies, yet coming to pay, diving in his Pocket for Coal, he finds all as clear as a room new swept; thus by my free entertainment, I free him from the sin of covetousnesse.

In the spoof pamphlet, *Strange & true Nevves from Jack-a-Newberries Six Windmills* (1660: 3–4), the members of the chuck office created by Mrs Fotheringham establish twenty-five orders, including

that it be lawful for such as enter themselves into our community to have free leave (without being questioned for the fact) to pick any mans pockets either of gold, silver, Rings or watches, if he put his hands in their plackets.

Moreover, any theft must be afterwards denied ‘for the credit of our good-old-cause’. Another order declares that whores must be proficient at placing ‘cushions under their coats causing their Cullies to believe they are with child, and not to take under ten pound to discharge them thereof’. Indeed, rogue literature abounds with examples of prostitutes making the most from an unwanted pregnancy.⁵⁹ A play by Charles II’s favourite comic actor, John Lacy, entitled *The Old Troop* tells the story of the prostitute Dol Troop who makes her living by keeping company with the regiment. After realizing she is pregnant, Dol declares that she has found her meal ticket: ‘I mean to lay this great belly to every man that has but touched my apron strings.’⁶⁰

Some published sources claimed to describe real-life women and their conduct. A *Catalogue of Jilts, Cracks & Prostitutes, Night-walkers, Whores, She-friends, Kind Women and others of the Linnen-lifting Tribe* (1691: 1) was the last in a series of six broadsides published in anticipation of St Bartholomew’s Fair that was to be held in August 1691. It describes twenty-two real prostitutes, giving all the details necessary for their identification except for their full names. It warns of a certain Mrs Y- -g, for example, who will cost more than her advertised 2s. 6d. if she chooses to pick your pocket.

John Dunton published his periodical *The Night Walker: or, Evening Rambles in search After Lewd Women, With the conferences Held with Them, Etc. To Be publish’d Monthly* ‘Till a Discovery be made of all the chief Prostitutes in England, from the Pensionary Miss, down to the Common Strumpet in monthly instalments between September 1696 and March 1697. Despite the titillating title and some salacious details, the serial constitutes a moral tract. Dunton’s father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been clergymen and Dunton himself was an

active member of the SRM. *The Night Walker's* narrator describes approaching prostitutes, pimps and their clients in the guise of someone looking to buy sex and then attempting to show them the error of their ways. His moralizing does seem to have hit a nerve in some women. In the instalment issued in October 1696, the narrator meets a beautiful, high-class prostitute in St James's Park who allows him to accompany her back to her well-furnished lodgings. She recounts how she was left without an inheritance after the death of her father and, on arriving in London, a bawd 'did easily draw me a side, and delude me into this vile Practice, which I must confess I abhor when I have any calm or sedate thoughts, but when I think of abandoning this way of living, then my former Straits stare me in the Face and Weakens my Resolves'. Dunton includes a great deal of description about the backgrounds of prostitutes but also offers some useful detail on their manner of working. He describes how one particular bawd ordered her girls to fight in the street if business was slow and sent pickpockets in among the crowd as they gathered to watch. The girls regularly broke into houses and, as a last resort, would pick the pockets of drunken lechers.

3.6 Did prostitutes form part of a 'criminal underworld'?

It is tempting to base our theories of life in seventeenth-century London on our feelings for London today. We might imagine a more primitive, grubbier version of the city we know, set as a carbuncle of crime in an otherwise pastoral and law-abiding idyll. Shoemaker (1991: 284–5) has shown that, with the exception of the east end, prosecution rates in the urban parishes of Middlesex were much higher than in rural Middlesex between 1660 and 1725. It is possible that crime was less frequent in rural areas because villagers were more socially constrained by their families and communities or had less need or temptation to steal. However, Shoemaker believes that prosecution rates do not reflect instances of petty crime; he explains that many rural inhabitants were put off pursuing a prosecution by the distance they would be forced to travel to the nearest courthouse and instead preferred to settle their disputes by means of mediation.

McMullen (1984) has investigated the widespread belief – shared by some historians as well as contemporary observers – of London as a criminal gangland in which prostitutes and thieves were organized in a criminal fraternity. He has based his study upon members of the 'Elizabethan underworld': pickpockets, cutpurses, thieves, confidence-cheats, fences, panderers and prostitutes. He argues that the close association between prostitution and theft was not

inevitable. There was a distinct difference between those who earned their living from the sale of the sex and those who posed as prostitutes in order to steal from clients. He contends that professional organized crime did exist in London but only because the city presented a larger, more anonymous population and a denser concentration of valuable goods:

London emerged as the urban equivalent of the greenwood forest – an anonymous refuge providing routine avenues for persistent crime. The masses of consumer goods displayed in open stalls and shops made petty theft easy. The concentration of a large population living near or below the poverty line, little influenced by religious or moral ideology, provided criminal work groups with ready-made material. The institutions of leisure and entertainment were the haunts of pickpockets, confidence cheats, and prostitutes. The patrons of such pleasure resorts – the gentry and the rising professionals – were the abundant and lucrative targets of the thief and the cony-catcher.⁶¹

Whether or not London's population can be accurately depicted as wild, lawless and immoral requires much more research. Indeed, some scholars counter that the people of preindustrial London did enjoy close social bonds with one another while unique institutions such as the guilds, apprenticeship system and the ward system of local government, helped maintain public order and provide poor relief.⁶² Levels of social cohesion were most likely tested in the second half of the seventeenth century due, as Shoemaker (1991: 10–16) believes, to the decline of the wardmote system and the guilds. Moreover, during this period, around 8,000 immigrants arrived each year to swell the population, mainly settling in the suburbs around the city, which led to high levels of unemployment and poverty. This does not necessarily mean that the inhabitants of London, particularly those newly arrived immigrants, spent their time drifting through the city committing crimes. Most of the people who moved to London were searching for legitimate work and many already had friends or family members living in the city. Once employed, they rapidly became attached to their workmates and, in their leisure time, they were able to make new social ties in places like alehouses and playhouses. However, those who failed to find jobs or whose temporary contracts ran out must have dented the city's sense of order, even if it was only in terms of the higher presence of beggars roaming the streets.

It does appear that Londoners themselves bought into the concept that they were constantly under threat. Henry Goodcole wrote six news-pamphlets between 1618 and 1637 and has been described by Martin (2009: 1) as England's

first professional crime writer. Goodcole was one of the first ordinaries of Newgate to publish pamphlets about the crimes of its prisoners. Goodcole's *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry sent after Lust and Murther* of 1635 sold well and went through several editions. Describing the criminal behaviour of Elizabeth Evans and her lover Thomas Shearwood, who robbed and murdered three gentlemen in London between 1634 and 1635, the pamphlet made a forceful attempt to connect commercial sex with violence in the minds of its readers. Goodcole related how Evans would accost a man in the streets, often pretending to be a forgotten acquaintance, and 'with her deceitfull smiles, and salutes, so inchants, and incaptivates, and leads him unto slaughter'. Like a 'decoy Ducke', Evans would arrange to meet the victim in a secluded location where he would then be bludgeoned and robbed by Shearwood.

Goodcole referred to specific locations in London in his murder-narrative which were well-known haunts for thieves and prostitutes: Shearwood and Evans initially came across their final victim, Robert Claxton, near 'the Kings gate which is by Bloomesbury' and Evans later took him 'into Grayes-Inne fields'. Rowland Holt, murdered in January 1635, was killed in Clerkenwell field, a notorious location for illicit sex. Martin (2009: 7) has argued that Goodcole identified the murder locations by name in order to ensure that his readers, as inhabitants of London, would connect the crimes with real or imagined fears concerning their own personal safety. Goodcole tacitly purported to be offering a public service: he urged his readers to greater vigilance of their surroundings and their own personal safety.⁶³

Capp (1996: 23), in a study of seventeenth-century serial killers, has decreed that the names of Shearwood and Evans 'passed into the popular memory as archetypal figures of evil'. Indeed, it has been argued that Goodcole's pamphlet hardened public attitudes against prostitutes. Martin (2009: 8) asserts that, from 1637 onwards, records of the Court of Aldermen and the Journals of the Common Council start to document complaints of 'lewd and idle women being common nightwalkers wandring the streets of this city to attempt and entice youth and other people to lewdness in the evenings'. From this point onwards, prostitutes were regularly identified as being 'enticers' of men in the records of proceedings by London magistrates. Minutes before his execution, Shearwood, rather ignobly, warned the onlookers 'to beware of Whores, for they were the worst Company in the World, wishing all to beware by his fall, and not to bee seduced, or blind-fold led, as hee was by such bewitching Creatures, to irrevocable ruine'.

In the last two decades of the seventeenth century, popular fears that a crime wave was underway magnified. The SRM initially targeted bawdy houses as they believed that

they are not only the nurseries of the most horrid vices, and sinks of the most filthy debaucheries, but also (as we suppose them) the common receptacles, or rather, dens, of notorious thieves, robbers, traitors and other criminals, that fly from public justice.⁶⁴

Brothels did provide a focal point for a wide range of criminal activity. They provided a 'supportive background' where criminals were introduced to one another, crimes were planned and information was exchanged. Meanwhile bawds themselves often doubled as brokers, helping thieves dispose of stolen goods. Brothel owners sometimes managed a number of establishments but it is doubtful that the relationships between keepers consisted of anything beyond a loose association. They were, however, prepared to trade or pool prostitutes when necessary. McMullen (1984: 24, 130, 139–40) has shown that brothels were a lucrative investment and, as such, formed part of a wider pattern of property ownership.⁶⁵ Yet it appears that the perpetrators of most criminal acts were not members of professional gangs. Crime in London remained largely unorganized and opportunistic: liaisons between criminals did exist but they were informal and temporary.

Houses that lodged prostitutes attracted thieves and pickpockets and were thought to harbour forgers, embezzlers and false witnesses. In May 1576 Richard Smethwick identified six cutpurses 'with a great nomber more that lye commonly every saturday at night in a barne at the further ende of Tuttle street' in Westminster; another two sleeping in an alehouse in Warwick Lane; and several more gathered at a barn between Lambeth Marsh and the bishop of Carlisle's house, 'with dyverse whores thear with them'. Again, the connection between such criminals and prostitutes is amorphous: it appears that some of these men may have been involved in the everyday working lives of prostitutes as go-betweens or bullies. Others acted as accomplices by helping prostitutes steal small sums from their clients. More rarely, some lodging house brothels operated a ploy known as 'cheating nunnery' in which a client would be blackmailed with exposure – to his family or the law – if he refused to pay up. Those prostitutes who had no option other than to take their clients to a backroom in an alehouse or coffee house would be familiar with crossbiters who lived by swindle and extortion.⁶⁶ Whether or not there was any long-term association between the

two groups is difficult to ascertain and depended very much on the emotions and *modus operandi* of the individuals involved.⁶⁷

However, proximity to 'pimps, panderers and bullies' also posed a danger to prostitutes and some found themselves on the receiving end of these men's criminal ventures. Blackmailing prostitutes was an easy source of revenue but some criminals preferred to sell information directly to the authorities in return for reward or reprieve. Of course, informers were not always motivated by greed: some spies were upstanding members of the community who regarded prostitution with deep disapproval. Although McMullen (1984: 141–2) has concluded that it was improbable that integrated rings of pimps and panderers existed, it is likely that many prostitutes found themselves in the clutches of parasites, consenting to their demands only through fear of violence.

Research by Griffiths (1993) into the world of petty criminals has revealed that more males than females worked as pickpockets, nippers, pickers and cutpurses. Some prostitutes were content to limit their activities to selling their bodies and regarded theft as an immoral means of making a living. One woman, Alice Sharpe, who came to London to find employment, was procured by a Mrs Green who consoled her that 'it is better to doe so then to steale'.⁶⁸

3.7 The emergence of compassion

Public attitudes regarding prostitutes became more complex as the seventeenth century progressed. In the first half of the seventeenth century, commentators on real-life criminals tended to account for their behaviour by reducing it to the single factor of human sin. Many writers of early modern crime stories were Calvinist-trained clergymen who had encountered their subjects first-hand while administering their professional duties in county jails. These clerics presented criminals as simply having been susceptible to vices which respectable people were able to keep at bay through self-discipline or as a result of external controls on their behaviour. Martin (2009) has described how, in the 1660s, with the emergence of commercial journalism such as assize-trial reports and newspapers, crime writers began to acknowledge contingent circumstances such as poverty and unemployment. Martin has singled out Henry Goodcole's *Heavens Speedie Hue and Cry* as one of the first murder pamphlets to expand on the moral explanations of homicide. Not only does Goodcole elucidate on the lowly circumstances of the murderers, Thomas Shearwood and Elizabeth Evans, he also presents London itself, with its criminalized spaces posing permanent

danger to inhabitants, as bearing a degree of blame. Goodcole's readers would have recognized Shearwood and Evans as belonging to the large group of migrants that flooded seventeenth-century London in search of work. However, as Martin highlights, rather than present the couple as simply descending into a life of crime by choice, Goodcole looks upon Evans with something approaching sympathy. He explains that her family and friends had withdrawn their emotional and financial support after she had made the social error of losing her virginity while unmarried.

By the 1720s, influenced by writers such as Goodcole, a new narrative describing the descent of seduced and abandoned women into prostitution had been constructed.⁶⁹ As we have seen, the seventeenth-century whore existed in the popular imagination as a ruthless and corrupting influence. Not only does she manipulate, infect and steal from her naïve clients, she also viciously revels in her immorality. This image did persist but it was challenged by the first glimmers of compassion for prostitutes, represented by a new discourse that the prostitute was a powerless victim of unfortunate circumstances.⁷⁰ This change was perhaps connected with an adjustment in general attitudes to women that had begun during the Restoration. For the first time, women were being portrayed as delicate and passive creatures that were naturally modest,⁷¹ an image sorely at odds with the lusty and thieving whores portrayed in earlier seventeenth-century print.

3.8 Conclusion

Seventeenth-century literature featured a cast of hardened and manipulative whores who delighted in ruining the lives of gullible young men. As we saw in Chapter 2, this links in to a degree with the life experience of some prostitutes, though by no means all of them. Given the evidence in Chapter 2, it is not a great surprise to have discovered in this chapter that there is evidence to suggest that respectable people regarded prostitutes as a corrupting influence on the binds of conventional family life and social discipline. Prostitutes had to walk a fine line between self-promotion – which entailed being loud, visible and flamboyantly attired – and lying low to reduce the risk of arrest. Those prostitutes who appeared to flaunt their wantonness represented a particular affront to a society which valued silence, chastity and obedience in women. On a more practical level, neighbourhoods were disturbed by the nocturnal revels taking place in bawdy houses that were concentrated in particular areas of the city. One

expression of popular hostility towards prostitutes was a sequence of ritualized attacks on brothels by London apprentices throughout the seventeenth century. A more serious disturbance, which took place during the Easter of 1668, was most likely politically motivated. As noted in Chapter 2 and reinforced here, not all prostitutes were regarded with contempt: some communities accepted and valued individual whores, particularly when their presence encouraged an influx of men eager to partake of the wares of surrounding tradespeople.

In the last decade of the seventeenth century, the SRM was founded by a group of like-minded Puritan moralists. Targeting prostitutes rather than their clients, they succeeded in obtaining the prosecutions of thousands of women. The popularity of the SRM reached into the first quarter of the eighteenth century but was ultimately curtailed by a public perception that developed that saw their methods as spiteful and hypocritical.

As was shown in Chapter 2 and emphasized again in this chapter, archival evidence, supported by literary accounts, suggests that many prostitutes engaged in petty theft in order to supplement their incomes. However, those prostitutes who did steal probably did so opportunistically. Prostitutes, no doubt, associated with male criminals, in alehouses, brothels and lodging houses, and may have teamed up with them on occasion but such ties were usually temporary and informal and the former may have emerged the worse for wear in any such arrangement. This again ties in well to the findings presented in Chapter 2. However, in this chapter we have also seen that some prostitutes eschewed theft, believing that the selling of sexual favours was a more honest and principled way of making a living.

Chapters 2 and 3 have given us the background, which will allow us to begin to contextualize what we find when we investigate corpus data in the next chapter. With this context in place, we can now turn to consider how we would look for evidence of prostitution in public discourse. The review suggests some routes into this question – might we look at words like *bridewell*, for example, to see to what extent prostitutes were discussed with relation to imprisonment? Similarly, might we choose to look at words relating to punishments, such as carting, to see to what extent the punishment of prostitutes is discussed? While both of these approaches have some merit, they are also problematic. We wish to study public discourse in general and to see how prostitutes were represented in it. We do not specifically want to focus, for example, on the imprisonment and punishment of prostitutes. These themes may, given the historical context, emerge during the analysis – but they should not be the exclusive focus of it. Hence, we decided to look for words which could refer to prostitutes. We could then explore those

words to build a more general view of the representation of the group in the EEBO corpus. In doing so, we know that we will face difficulties – we will need to determine what words to look for at the very least. We will need to consider frequent words and infrequent words. Also, given the span of time covered, we must be prepared for the possibility that some words will become less frequent over time while others become more frequent. Issues such as these are the focus of the next chapter.