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This investigation of Victorian rhetorics—that is, the multiple genres making claims about prostitution—interrogates the network of social ideas and agents that rhetorically constructed the female prostitute through configurations of space and identity while participating in rhetorics of professionalization. While considering genre as cultural artifact (product) and social action (process), selected texts from diverse genres are analyzed, making transparent their claims about prostitution as articulated through representations of identity and space. Quite often, these claims were postulated through invocations of “contagion,” which, as a cultural screen, operated to direct an audience’s attention and interpretation. In addition, during the Victorian period, disciplines employed points of reference, like the prostitute, that within the dominant cultural codes facilitated their professionalization and carved their niches in the cultural milieu.

Each chapter of this work analyzes a different genre (newspaper articles, medical treatises, and fictional works, respectively) to demonstrate how contagion anxieties influenced what the prostitute represented and how she was used rhetorically. My study is one of process and product, as spaces and identities are defined by expectations, functions, and locations. The spatial rhetorics of a genre define the dynamics between text, location, and conceptions of identity. This interdisciplinary study examines how the deployment of these ideas performs a social mapping and uses the prostitute as a navigational marker to guide readers’ internalization of textual worlds and subsequent formation of knowledge.

THE RHETORIC OF PROSTITUTION IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

by

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For Dimitri
and
Socrates & Lucy

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| LIST OF TABLES | vi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | vii |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. CONTAGIOUS IDEAS: THE PROSTITUTE IN VICTORIAN RHETORICS | 1 |
| Contagious Spaces | 7 |
| Contagious Representations..... | 20 |
| II. REPORTING THE PROSTITUTE | 40 |
| <i>The London Times</i> | 47 |
| <i>The Daily News</i> | 64 |
| III. WILLIAM ACTON’S PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CONTAGIOUS PROSTITUTE | 81 |
| <i>Prostitution</i> as Product and Process..... | 94 |
| Categorizing the Prostitute..... | 108 |
| IV. SENSATION AND ANXIETY IN <i>THE NEW MAGDALEN</i> | 118 |
| <i>The New Magdalen</i> as Product and Process | 125 |
| Locating <i>The New Magdalen</i> | 136 |
| (Dis)Locating Mercy Merrick..... | 149 |
| V. AN INFECTED TRADITION: WRITING THE PROSTITUTE | 162 |
| Why (Re)Locate the Prostitute?..... | 192 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 195 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Table 1. Graphed Results for “prostitut*” (<i>The Times</i>) | 49 |
| Table 2. “prostitute” results (<i>The Times</i>) | 51 |
| Table 3. “prostitutes” results (<i>The Times</i>) | 51 |
| Table 4. “prostitution” results (<i>The Times</i>)..... | 52 |
| Table 5. Marylebone and Aldershott Comparison (<i>The Times</i>)..... | 53 |
| Table 6. Graphed Results for “prostitut*” (<i>The Daily News</i>) | 67 |
| Table 7. “prostitute” results (<i>The Daily News</i>) | 68 |
| Table 8. “prostitutes” results (<i>The Daily News</i>) | 69 |
| Table 9. “prostitution” results (<i>The Daily News</i>)..... | 69 |
| Table 10. Marylebone and the Haymarket Comparison (<i>The Daily News</i>)..... | 70 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Figure 1. Plate Three of <i>The Harlot's Progress</i> | 11 |
| Figure 2. "The Happy Mother" | 13 |
| Figure 3. Advertisement for Acton's <i>Prostitution</i> (<i>The Times</i>)..... | 43 |
| Figure 4. Map of Nineteenth-Century Marylebone from Mitton's <i>The Fascination of London</i> | 54 |
| Figure 5. "Marylebone" Article Headline (<i>The Times</i>) | 55 |
| Figure 6. "Aldershott Map," circa Nineteenth Century | 60 |
| Figure 7. "Marylebone" Article Headline (<i>The Daily News</i>) | 67 |
| Figure 8. "Streetscape showing Haymarket Theatre, London," circa Nineteenth Century | 75 |

CHAPTER I

CONTAGIOUS IDEAS: THE PROSTITUTE IN VICTORIAN RHETORICS

There is an ever-present physical danger, so fatally destructive that the world would recoil, as from the spring of a serpent, could they but appreciate its malignity; a malignity which is daily and hourly threatening every man, woman, and child in the community...

– William Sanger, *The History of Prostitution* (1858)¹

Matchstick girls, seamstresses, factory girls, domestic servants—these are just a few of the female populations in Victorian England susceptible to identification as “prostitute,” an opprobrious term that by 1607 singularly applied to women who sold sex acts or were promiscuous, though previously it had described men as well. By the nineteenth century, the term primarily implicated lower class women whose lack of social status rendered their reputations suspect. While “prostitute” commonly indicated a female numb to normal feelings who engaged repeatedly in crass and callous sexual acts, females identified as prostitutes included those who had indulged in a private, single indiscretion, those who had chosen the sex trade as a vocation, and those who had violated rules of space and dress and were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

All females interacting in public, economic, and male spheres could be vulnerable to accusations that they were prostitutes. Since patriarchal codes construct the imagined private/domestic and public spaces, and configure the former as feminine, transgressors

¹ An American physician, Sanger’s approach to prostitution echoes that of Acton and Parent-Duchâtelet.

of the public/private boundary were viewed with suspicion. They were often also considered “disorderly.” *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines “disorderly” as describing persons or their actions as “Opposed to or violating moral order, constituted authority, or recognized rule or method; not submissive to rule, lawless,” and by 1824, the term “disorderly person” indicated “one guilty of one of a number of offences against public order as defined by various Acts of Parliament.” Linking personal behavior and social expectation enabled the attempted regulation of the social and individual body. For the prostitute, her “excess sexuality” and interaction in the public sphere transgressed boundaries of decorum and space. Many authorities believed that the prostitute’s sexual proclivities went so far as to disorder her gender, rendering her unfeminine, if not “unsexed” (Acton, *Contagious* 24). Patriarchal determinations thus relegated the prostitute outside of society—outside of gender—and she came to represent the consequences of female “disorderliness.”

Dominant social discourse dictated that any degree of female disorderliness implied a capacity for greater offense, so the prostitute, as the extreme example of a disorderly female, was rhetorically constructed as exemplum and served as a warning: As prostitutes go, so may all disorderly women, regardless of their infraction. In her various forms, from factory girl to flâneuse to prostitute, the female street wanderer interacted in the public sphere. Locating this wandering figure within the masculine construction of public space reveals the patriarchal codes mapping the social spaces she inhabited (Nord 1-4). The social practices that simultaneously created and excluded the prostitute contributed to the rhetorical construction of her identity, location, and function.

In this dissertation, I focus on the prostitute's rhetorical construction, which has been overlooked by established lines of inquiry, though studies of Victorian prostitution have generated extensive scholarship. Paul McHugh and Paula Bartley's historical examinations and Judith Walkowitz's studies of gender and class divulge the discourse networks that constitute the subject.² The work of Deborah Epstein Nord and Ellen Bayuk Rosenman is especially beneficial to my study. Nord examines the tensile spaces of spectator, spectatorship, and streetwalker in the urban landscape, focusing on women who seek to become observers rather than the observed. Rosenman explores Victorian sexual dissidence, focusing on "experiences that do not reach the threshold of official perversity," such as the flâneur's urban wanderings, and reading them as erotic experience (3). My project investigates how intersecting genres and their rhetorical practices construct ideas about the prostitute through configurations of space and identity while participating in rhetorics of professionalization.

My project, an interdisciplinary examination of how anxieties about contagion influenced what the prostitute represented and how she was used rhetorically, is a study of process *and* product, as spaces and identities are defined by expectations, functions, and locations. Spatial rhetorics provide a means for investigating the dynamics between text, location, and conceptions of identity. Jessica Enoch (2008) outlines spatial rhetorics as "those material and discursive practices that work to compose and enhance a space. Rhetorics of space explain what a space should be, what it should do, and what should go

² See McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995) and Levine's *Prostitution, Race, & Politics* (2003) for extensions of Walkowitz's discussion. McClintock situates her work as truly interdisciplinary, striving to "refuse the clinical separation of psychoanalysis and history" (8), while Levine scrutinizes contagious disease regulation in the British colonies.

inside it” (276).³ Some spatial approaches begin by investigating physical, real-world locations; I focus, however, on narrative portrayals of space and their effects upon how readers internalize their imparted information.⁴ Defining space categorizes its denizens as well as those it displaces, a process that intimately connects identity with space. As Judith Butler argues, we create the very thing that we exclude, so identity becomes both practice and product of discourse. We can understand, then, that the construction of identity—in this case, the identity of “prostitute”—participates in a network of discursive social practices: Analyzing this network requires “treating discourses...as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, *Archaeology* 54). Scrutinizing discursive practices exposes how we produce and, subsequently, exclude the prostitute.

Understanding Victorian rhetorics, by which I mean the multiple genres making claims about prostitution, requires interrogating the network of social ideas and agents. As cultural constructions, genres play significant roles in forming discursive practices and, subsequently, possess ideological power (Devitt 160). The work of Carolyn R. Miller, Amy J. Devitt, Anis S. Bawarshi, and Mary Jo Reiff has instigated a discussion of genre as action and cultural artifact; for the purposes of my project, I read genre through this lens, and each chapter of my dissertation examines a genre—newspaper, medical

³ Spatial rhetorics evolved from traditional geographic studies and offers an interdisciplinary method for reading the connections between space, place, and identity. Grounded upon Lefebvre’s work, particularly *The Production of Space*, which was published in France in 1974 and translated into English in 1991, these theories offer categories of spatial practice: representations of space, and representational spaces, which respectively translate into perceived, conceived, and lived spaces. See Massey, Reynolds and McDowell.

⁴ My use of “narrative” encompasses both visual and written texts that impart a sequence of events/story.

treatise, and fiction, respectively—that makes claims about prostitution through representations of identity and space. I consider how, as a process, genre participates in the production of cultural beliefs through portrayals of space and its inhabitants. I also attend to productions of genre, to the physical products that take up material space and are read/interpreted as a mirror of society, such as legislation, newspaper articles, medical treatises, short stories, and novels. I pay particular attention to the terministic screens that constructed the prostitute. Kenneth Burke predicated his terministic screen theory upon the power of terminology to direct attention as well as intention: “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (45). Victorian rhetorics, for instance, heavily associated prostitutes and prostitution with physical and moral contagion. Contagion became the cultural screen through which prostitutes were viewed and represented, an association that generated anxiety. My project examines the relationship between anxieties about contagion and representations of prostitutes and shows how the frame of contagion skewed the rhetorical use of the latter.

By invoking the prostitute figure as a rhetorical construction, Victorian texts across social realms assembled a cultural mapping, while participating in the production of knowledge about space and identity and building upon existing presumptions and assumptions. Michel Foucault elucidates the relationship between underlying cultural codes and knowledge production In *The Order of Things*: “The fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemes of perception, its exchanges, its

techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for [everyone], from the very first, the empirical orders with which [we] will be dealing and within which [we] will be at home” (xx). Whether legislative or literary or another form entirely, texts that (re)produced ideas about the prostitute and prostitution influenced social understanding about these subjects. Meanwhile, this cross-disciplinary process of production and consumption augmented the social power of the texts and their writers through the (re)iteration of Victorian cultural codes.

Disciplines during the Victorian Period, as today, employed points of reference that, within the dominant cultural codes, facilitated their professionalization and carved their niches in the cultural milieu: The prostitute was one such “point.” Professions employing the rhetorical figure of “prostitute” in these ways crafted an ethos of respectability—or, at least, its appearance. Through their respective genres, professions invoked the prostitute as a point of resistance against which the authority and social power of their fields could be established. Thus, the interaction of genres with rhetorics of professionalization established ethos (identity) and the profession (space). For example, medical texts like William Acton’s editions of *Prostitution*, which are discussed extensively in chapter three, use the prostitute as a point of resistance; in building a case against her, the text positions itself, and its writer, and thus the field that both represent, as social authorities. Publications by physicians like Acton typically possessed more clout than experimental fiction by unknown writers since different genres were associated with different degrees of influence. Regardless of their assumed or projected degree of social

power, such texts, as participants in rhetorics of professionalization, produced portrayals of space that impacted constructions of identity and influenced the dominant discourse.

As a point of reference, the term *prostitute* as well as what it represents became a “navigational point.” Just as rhetorics of professionalization used the prostitute as a point of resistance against which social norms and ideas could be established, so did other Victorian rhetorics, which often employed her to illustrate, or map, how contagion and infection transgressed boundaries, particularly in regards to social class. My study examines three sites of “infection” as illustrated by the prostitute: physical spaces associated with the presence and operation of prostitutes; the infiltration of presumably “safe” physical spaces with the dangerous prostitute, such as a former prostitute’s assimilation into the domestic sphere; and the assumption that all women located in physical spaces associated with the presence and operation of prostitutes *were* prostitutes (or susceptible to becoming one). These fluid and transgressive states undermine any attempt to construct an ordered knowledge of prostitutes and prostitution; they also refute attempts to use the prostitute to guide readers’ formation of knowledge about the relationships between spaces and identities. Many Victorian rhetorics, however, exerted efforts to establish the contrary.

Contagious Spaces

Historically, prostitutes and prostitution are associated with ports and army towns. Walkowitz and Philippa Levine have researched prostitution in military areas in England and abroad and traced how concerns about disease led to regulations and legislation

designed to protect members of the British military. Poor living conditions and restrictions on marriage led many enlisted men to transact with prostitutes. While contracting venereal disease was a real danger in Britain's port and garrison towns, the danger increased abroad because it was assumed that venereal diseases "acquired in the tropics were more virulent, long-lasting and damaging—at least to Europeans—than domestic versions" (Levine, "Public" 166). Military men who returned to England after being infected while in tropical climes were turned into "unhealthy and unmanly Easterners" by their foreign-acquired disease(s), which doubly marked them as contagious: They could transmit non-Englishness as well as venereal disease (166).⁵ Many prostitutes took economic advantage of the transient population in ports and army towns, increasing infection rates in those areas, and when the infected, both military and civilian, returned to England, they added to those already significant numbers through presence and deed.

While Victorian rhetorics often fault prostitutes for the spread of venereal disease within the British military, little blame is placed upon the promiscuous soldiers. Moves to protect the presumed dignity of soldiers went so far as to exempt them from physical examinations for venereal disease—no such measures were taken for prostitutes whose lifestyle, many believed, left them insensible to the physical and emotional discomfort inflicted by compulsory examination. Action to protect the civilian populace beyond these ports and army towns from the spread of disease was also considered. However,

⁵ Any man traveling abroad would encounter these dangers, but it was particularly significant that military men serving abroad to protect the Empire's interests might return home only to undermine those protective acts. See Levine's "Public Health, Venereal Disease and Colonial Medicine in the Later Nineteenth Century."

though the military profession required mobility, and many military personnel were infected, the mobility of prostitutes raised the greatest. Social authorities worried that prostitutes travelling between ports, army towns, and other areas were disseminating contagion along the way. These worries contributed to the climate that produced the Contagious Disease Acts (CDAs).

During the mid-nineteenth century, attention turned to the dangers of prostitution threatening the Empire from within the social body. My project focuses on prostitution in London during the latter half of the century. As a figure of the urban landscape, the prostitute became symbolic of the urban disease/dis-ease of the later nineteenth century. Prostitutes constituted a visible population, though recorded statistics of that population fluctuate wildly. Bartley states, “Mid-century figures for London fluctuate between 5,000 and 220,000 (which made 7 percent of the population). In the 1860s some suggested that there were up to half a million prostitutes in England yet police statistics maintained that numbers were in the region of 30,000” (2). These discrepancies reflect varied and/or faulty methods of collecting data. Statistical analysis was developing, but at this nascent stage, broad definitions of prostitution plus inefficient and inconsistent methods of questioning yielded unreliable data about the true extent of prostitution.

The physical danger of prostitution was real, and venereal disease and prostitutes’ role in its spread was a true topic of concern for early public health endeavors. Though data again cannot be verified, and the low mortality rate of adult venereal disease patients affected interpretations of data, we can get a general view from various researchers. In 1846, Acton reported that almost half of the surgical outpatients at St. Bartholomew’s

Hospital in London were suffering from venereal complaints (*Prostitution*, 53-4; 2nd ed). According to Walkowitz, “In the 1860s, the Royal Free Hospital reported [more than half of their outpatients were] venereal outpatients. Furthermore, complications due to venereal disease accounted for one-eighth to one-fifth of the outpatient cases at the eye and ear hospital, and one-fifth the surgical patients at the children’s hospital had hereditary syphilis” (*Prostitution* 49). Some Victorians challenged these reports of high numbers, but others were alarmed by the intimation of a venereal disease epidemic. The numbers reported thirty years after Acton’s 1846 findings are less alarming: Workhouse union returns attested that “In the first week of 1876, 43,548 patients were recorded as diseased, of whom 2 percent (915) were diagnosed with some form of [venereal disease]” (Levine, *Prostitution* 42). These statistics were also challenged, but regardless, they marked the prostitute as a vector of contagion that if left unchecked could undermine the strength of the British Empire.

The physical dangers of prostitution affected Victorian rhetorics indelibly. Connected with urban dis-ease throughout nineteenth-century culture, the prostitute represented contagion anxieties, both literal (venereal disease) and figurative (degeneration). The multiple threats presented by the prostitute encouraged her positioning as a scapegoat for society’s ills and as an exemplum for all disorderly women. Through spatial rhetorics, definitive claims about prostitutes and prostitution were made, and these claims manifest clearly in a diachronic examination of texts from diverse genres. The remainder of this chapter examines how visual texts, such as engravings, and written texts, including poetry, fiction, newspaper articles, and

legislation, use representations and rhetorical constructions of the prostitute to make claims about identity and space. In doing so, these texts also make assertions about the social power of their own genres, whether that power is to entertain, frighten, or regulate.

As a representation of identity, location, and function, the prostitute proliferates England's literature and art, prefiguring Victorian uses. William Hogarth's 1731 series of narrative paintings collectively known as *A Harlot's Progress* classically illustrates how



Figure 1. Plate Three of *The Harlot's Progress*

narrative portrayals of space construct identity and (re)iterate the dominant discourse about prostitution.⁶ The series consists of six images that convey the story of Moll Hackabout, a lower class girl persuaded into prostitution; this archetypal story is repeated in various forms throughout British discourse about prostitution. Plate One shows Moll, who is carrying implements used by seamstresses, being cajoled by an old bawd into a life of vice. Each consecutive image depicts Moll's story in stages: mistress, common syphilitic prostitute, prisoner, dying syphilitic, and coffined corpse. The layers of detail in Hogarth's work direct the reader's attention and interpretation; for instance, the eye-catching witch's hat and birch rods in the background of Plate Three connote devilry and darkness with the practice of prostitution. Plate Three also emphasizes the physical disease risked by the prostitute and her customer. More conspicuously, Plates Three, Five, and Seven emphasize the physical disease engendered through prostitution: Moll's deterioration is depicted subtly in Plate Three through her numerous face patches and scattered medicinal paraphernalia. Plates Four through Six portray Moll's physical deterioration; Plate Five depicts her post-imprisonment, dying from venereal disease, and Plate Six is set during her wake, and though Moll is in her coffin, the vice associated with her neighborhood, Covent Garden, carries on through the syphilitic prostitutes and the lecherous preacher who are in attendance. The allegory of Hogarth's series points to the prostitute as a disseminator of disease and degradation. Along with others living a life of vice, she ensures that the cycle of social degeneration continues, despite the narrative's

⁶ I refer to Hogarth's 1732 engravings of the 1731 paintings, which were lost in a fire in 1755.

assurance that such degenerates will meet unsavory and lonely ends. The series provided visual reinforcement of the repercussions of prostitution and other vice.

The enduring popularity of *The Harlot's Progress* speaks to the narrative's sustained social relevancy, and the series' influence can be discerned in Victorian discourse about prostitution. In *Dombey and Son*, Charles Dickens's description of "Good Mrs. Brown," which echoes Hogarth's portrayal of the old bawd, offers one example. Moreover, by mid-nineteenth-century, rhetoric defining female identity emphasized the depravity of those like Moll by lauding their polar opposite: the Angel of the House. As a construction of female identity, the Angel was passive, submissive,

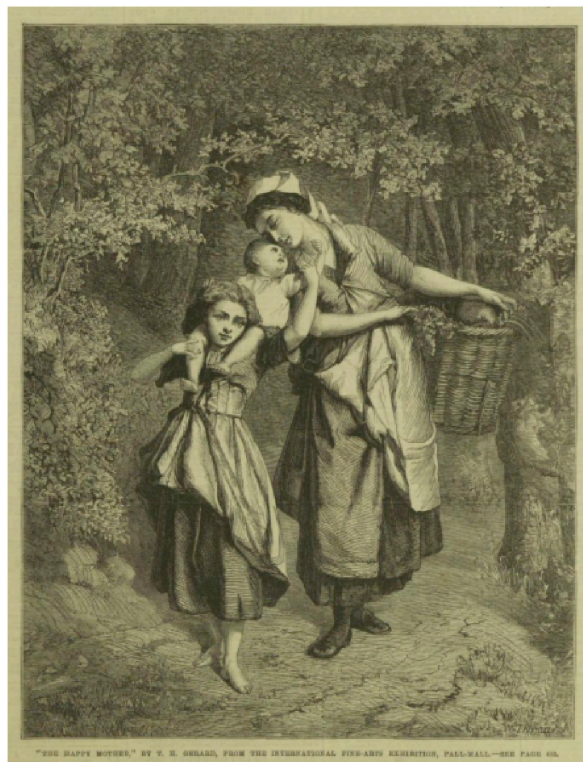


Figure 2. "The Happy Mother"

caretaking, and obedient. While the Angel ideal was typically applied to middle- and upper-class women, even lower-class women, like those who often “fell” into prostitution, could aspire to a version of the Angel. Belgian artist Theodore Gerard’s 1866 “The Happy Mother,” engraved in *The Illustrated London News* that same year, illustrates the entrenchment of that vision. Gerard depicts his subject as the embodiment of maternal love and devotion, a loving and caring mother despite her hard day of manual labor. The engraving’s accompanying article interprets the scene as a “[manifestation] of maternal and filial love”: The tired mother is carrying a heavy basket, and her children have come to greet her, and the moment when the son postures for “a reassuring kiss” is when “the mother’s cup of happiness [runs over.] For is there anything in this world at once so blessed to give and to receive, or so purely blissful, as the warm imprint of a fond mother’s kiss” (483). This ideal mother needs no confinement or regulation; she fulfills social expectations of working hard and caring for her children (and everyone else) more than herself. Gerard sets her successful support of the social *status quo* in nature, implying that within this “natural” setting, the “good” woman is happy and “free.” Whether an Angel of the House or of the Fields, the ensconced Angel, assured of her social place, starkly contrasts with the rejected prostitute, barred from society because of her disorderliness.

William Blake’s 1794 “London” also prefigures Victorian concerns about prostitution and degeneration. Blake’s poem weds images of mapped urban space and domestic space with a contagion that infects society on every level—from the individual

body to the institutions that govern the social body. Blake's London is a gritty capital of "charter'd streets" through which the first-person speaker wanders while observing "Marks of weakness, marks of woe" and hearing "the youthful Harlot's curse [that] Blasts the new born Infant's tear, /And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse" (53). Though Blake's speaker invokes the harlot and her curse, he blames society's woes upon its "mind-forg'd manacles." The speaker recognizes the connection between ideologies and anxieties. Decades later, though many Victorians, like Acton, recognized that social ideologies needed to change in order to alleviate the problem of prostitution, Victorian rhetorics consistently diagnosed the prostitute as symptomatic of society's degeneration and cast her in the role of society's scapegoat.

By the late nineteenth century, depictions of London's urban landscape as infected were symptomatic of a growing urban paranoia that stemmed from the belief that urban spaces were menacing "depositories of disorder of all kinds, including the disorder of chronic and epidemic disease" (Jacyna 84). Significantly, despite these fears, urban areas like London were also considered centers of culture and education, providing access to the latest innovations and advances. The anxieties and benefits of urban living enjoyed a fraught co-existence:

...the rhetoric of urban contagion, in which the uncontrolled circulation of noxious things – miasmatic air, raw sewage, unclean water, prostitutes, sexual texts and images – was understood as the unwelcome consequence of city living, with its network of avenues and sewers linking respectable homes to sources of contamination. (Rosenman 37-8)

This constant undercurrent of peril threatened the domestic home and social body. With its large and diverse population, “the city encouraged a sexual paranoia with its promiscuous intermingling of ambiguous bodies” (13). This fear of ambiguity exacerbated anxieties about the “contagious” prostitute; as a carrier of disease and moral degeneracy, the prostitute, considered the nearly inhuman “unknown,” was limned by society for her depravity. The idea that “ambiguous bodies” could gather together, that the female next to you might be a degenerate masquerading behind beauty and superficial manners, infecting a domestic space with public disease, heightened anxieties about identity—who a person was, where she belonged, and what she did within that space became increasingly important. Social codes and interventions evolved to protect the body social from the perceived threat.

Clarifying who inhabited public and domestic spaces were among the moves intended to lessen the potential for masquerade and infiltration. Proper social behavior had gained importance because those who adhered to social codes typically possessed a stable social status. Well before the Victorian Period, this emphasis manifested in the prevalence of conduct books, which attempted to stabilize and standardize individual behavior and its context within social identity. Texts like John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), Elizabeth Sanford’s *Woman and Her Social and Domestic Character* (1831), and Matilda Pullan’s *Maternal Counsels to a Daughter* (1855) bequeathed readers the knowledge needed to fulfill certain expectations of

behavior.⁷ While some books in the genre were how-to manuals for beauty treatments, dance etiquette, or fan communication, others were less superficial. For instance, Pullan, who published *Maternal Counsels* during the Victorian Period, encouraged her readers to be industrious at all times, though she cautions, “when we speak of putting all our heart and energies into our employment, let us also be sure that the occupation itself is one which is worthy of our destined as responsible and immortal beings” (31). This mindfulness of a higher design and the need to actively contribute to society’s betterment through improvement of the self permeates the conduct book genre. Females who followed the strictures laid out in these popular readings fulfilled the expectations of patriarchal society. Theoretically, then, these obedient and orderly women who were not of the lower classes would avoid the spaces, people, and situations that could induce a “fall” from a seemingly stable social position. Such tactics only superficially quelled concerns about the steadiness and reliability of female character, however.

Social anxieties about contagion *vis-à-vis* prostitutes and prostitution continued to spread, and fears of a prostitution epidemic escalated, in part, because of individuals like Acton, who asserted (rightly) that prostitution was a “transitory state” and that a prostitute may very well “become the wife of an Englishman and the mother of his offspring” if she were not a mother already” (*Prostitution*, 2nd ed. 246). The suggestion that a former prostitute could change spaces and social stations was alarming to many

⁷ For a discussion of the connection between conduct books and “the ideological role of the mother...bonding the reader, at least in theory, into a framework of categorical self-definition: learning, and playing out, the part of the receptive yet obedient daughter, and thus ensuring the transmission of values and practices from one generation to the next,” see Flint’s *The Woman Reader* 71.

because if margins are dangerous, so are the movements between spaces by marginalized subjects: “Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others” (Douglas 119). Therefore, a former prostitute’s successful assimilation into the role of wife, mother, or nurse, a progression depicted in Wilkie Collins’s *The New Magdalen*, often generated alarm rather than praise.

Within the domestic sphere, the prostitute presented double threats of infection and infiltration. These dangers destabilized the security of the home and the order of the social body. Stories of successful (or nearly so) assimilations contributed to social anxieties with their revelations that “the specter of disease [might] invisibly [invade] the middle-class home, the chance that the chaste bride had a secret past, the unsettling possibility that ‘bad’ women and ‘good’ women were interchangeable. The streetwalker took on a newly powerful meaning as an agent of far-reaching contamination” (Nord 11). As a result, prostitution reform focused more on the prostitute as a threat to the stability of British society than on the real, physical practices that propagated venereal disease. This shift further cemented the prostitute’s role as scapegoat for the ills afflicting Victorian society.

The patriarchy responded to the prostitute and attendant anxieties with moves to control and contain the disorderly female. The female body as a metaphor in the intersection of text and space traditionally promoted a theme of domination of the “fairer sex” and place. The infamously gendered frontispiece map in H. Rider Haggard’s 1885 *King Solomon’s Mines* offers one such example. The illustration reinscribes cultural

systems, reiterated by the narrative, that associate gender with geography, evoking the reading that the land, like a woman's body, will be traversed, entered, and colonized. The adventure narrative conveys the map textually, creating what can be termed a periplum, or cartography rendered through prose. These periploi, across genres, map material space and inform readers' interpretations of place. Bracebridge Hemyng's "Prostitution in London" employs textual cartography—periploi—to guide the reader's journey (i.e. reading process) from theatres like The Earl of Effingham and The Pavilion, to tally-shops on the New Road in Whitechapel, and to lodging houses in Ship Alley.⁸ The depictions of prostitutes and their practices in such places influences how readers' form knowledge about a place. Readers came to associate certain places as infected by prostitution and others as protected from it. Subsequently, narrative portrayals of space socially mapped prostitutes and the practice of prostitution.

The diverse narratives heretofore discussed in this chapter diachronically illustrate the prostitute's use as a rhetorical construction. Whether portrayed in Covent Garden or the chartered London streets, the prostitute, when located within these spaces, represents contagion. These portrayals of space employ the prostitute as a navigational marker, guiding readers' formation of knowledge about who the prostitute is, where she belongs, and what she does. Reciprocally, readers' form ideas about who is not a prostitute, where non-prostitutes belong, and what non-prostitutes do. Quite often, texts—both fiction and nonfiction—use their portrayals of space to critique and challenge the dominant discourse about prostitution, and these iterations also influence readers' formation of knowledge.

⁸ "Prostitution in London" is a section in Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*.

The following section offers an illustration of the interaction across genres that generate our understandings about space and identity. Though written in 1778, well before the onset of the Victorian Period, *Evelina* offers a “foundational” example of the ways representations of space illustrated contagion anxieties about the prostitute and prostitution. A limited reading of the 1867 *Dombey and Son*, juxtaposed with the 1864 Contagious Disease Act, demonstrates how these concepts about space and identity were developing in the nineteenth-century, amidst the controversial context of the public conversation about prostitution.

Contagious Representations

Evelina is a novel of manners that, while prefiguring early nineteenth-century writers like Jane Austen, takes place largely in London rather than enclosed estates. Frances Burney introduces the idea of contagion in her preface to *Evelina*, wedding it to the novel form. In the preface, Burney positions herself as the editor of the collection of letters that constitute the novel. As “editor,” Burney uses the metaphor of contagion to speak to patriarchal concerns that outside forces would destabilize the social construction of the female body; she makes use of the metaphor to make a claim that her novel is not a romance and does not reject reason or “probability” (55-6), a retaliation against declaimers of the novel genre (mostly men) who were wont to argue otherwise:

...since the distemper [novels] have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic...surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than condemned. (55)

Instead of contributing to women's over-indulgence in romances, which often led to diagnoses of detrimental fancifulness, weakness, and hysteria, Burney's preface suggests that *Evelina* will offer its female readers the opportunity to experience a type of Aristotelian catharsis, learning from the vicarious experience and becoming better equipped to deal with the narrated dangers. In other words, if a woman were to read *Evelina*, she would not find her mind or body unstable as a result. Instead, *Evelina* is emblematic of the dangers females faced, not only physical (assault, disease) but moral (ruination, falling).

The anxieties that manifest in *Evelina* did not vanish once the reading was completed and the book was shut. Instead, they escaped the novel's pages and were reproduced by myriad other written, spoken, and visual texts—all of which functioned as both process and product. In these reproductions, we can see how the triadic relationship of space, identity constructs, and genre operates in tandem with social anxieties. The majority of *Evelina* focuses on the title character's fraught negotiations of London's unfamiliar urban space; Evelina's innocence is questioned throughout the narrative because she repeatedly finds herself inhabiting inappropriate spaces. A particularly significant scene works as a periplum that charts the safe and unsafe spaces of London's Vauxhall Gardens, influencing figurative and literal interpretations of what Vauxhall is, who belongs in it, and what those associations do.

For over two hundred years, the pleasure garden offered public entertainments that included food, music, ruins, cascades, walking paths, and curiosities. Along with

these “public” pleasures, Vauxhall’s landscape made possible tête-à-têtes (romantic and otherwise), sexual transactions, and violence. Maps of Vauxhall, from different points of its history, detail the evolution of the tree-lined walks and dark corners that transformed areas of public space into a venue for presumed private encounters, though these “pseudo-private” acts were still occurring within the public sphere. The eponymous main character of *Evelina*, after attending a concert, recounts this versatility: “a most brilliant and gay appearance” of “trees, the numerous lights, and the company in the circle around the orchestra” (Burney 235). She and her party walk through the Gardens, observing a cascade and obtaining a box where they have dinner. All of these amusements take place in well-lit, public places, where the party can see and be seen. The party soon reduces to three—the eldest Miss Branghton, the slightly younger Branghton, and Evelina—and the eldest proposes a “turn in the dark walks” (237). This is a dangerous proposition, one that moves the three girls from the open spectatorship of central Vauxhall to the darker recesses of the Gardens; this change in physical location merits a change in figurative location as well. After all, these “dark walks,” earned their reputation from the presumably immoral acts that took place there.⁹ In an ancient, reductive analogy, darkness is to immorality as light is to morality. British society extended these associations to the classification of females located in the dangerous and immoral dark spaces. Such a “misstep” from the path of virtue and light easily left a female vulnerable to societal assignation, which frequently meant being labeled “fallen,” a moral, subjective

⁹ According to Straub, “Enclosed by overarching trees, the walks were closed off in 1793 because of complaints about people using them as a cover for illicit sex” (237).

judgment indicating a woman's failure to meet social expectations of virtue.¹⁰ Regardless of how far she actually "fell," once fallen, a woman was also considered "ruined," another synonym for social cipher.

Socially perceived connections between space and identity reverberate throughout the Vauxhall scene. By transgressing the boundaries of social acceptability and entering the dim alley, the Branghton girls and Evelina provoke doubts about their roles as "young ladies." Mr. Branghton's response to their misadventures enforces the assumption that physical location in dangerous space equates to intention, or at least desire, to participate in behaviors socially unacceptable and, therefore, dangerous to the person's status: Upon hearing of the girls' misadventures, he says, "'The long alleys!...and, pray, what had you to do in the long alleys? Why, to be sure, you must all of you have had a mind to be affronted!'" (Burney 241). The response of the men encountered by the girls in the dark alleys supports this reading. Evelina's fear of the first group of rowdy men that they encounter prompts her to run, which separates her from the Branghtons and leads her deeper into the recesses of Vauxhall. She encounters two more groups of leering, aggressive men; Sir Clement Willoughby is part of the second group, and he backs Evelina's claim that she is "no actress" (238).¹¹ Only a man of social standing could

¹⁰ A. Anderson's 1993 *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture*, in part, addresses the ideological shift from virtue defined by lineage and social rank to virtue as a private, intentionally sustained state: "The emergent middle-class ideology, which privileged the efforts, capacities, and worth of 'autonomous individuals,' challenged the status-based aristocratic ideology precisely by valorizing a model of identity or interiority based on a private, carefully guarded feminine virtue" (14). Maintaining this private virtue required careful education of conduct strictures, appropriate chaperoning, and personal vigilance. For an example of a woman's "fall" resulting from ignorance and a lack of strong parental instruction, see Cleland's 1750 *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*.

¹¹ Historically, acting has been a profession imbued with sexual politics. In the eighteenth-century, when *Evelina* was written, "actress" was a term often synonymous with "prostitute."

identify her as a lady, deter the taunters, and remove her from the location, all of which Willoughby does. However, he also interprets her presence in the walks as signifying that she is amenable to engaging in illicit behaviors. Apparently without Evelina's knowledge, he leads her along another alley where they "shall be least observed" and calls her "my angel" (239). Evelina accuses Willoughby of insolence and states, "from you, who know me, I had a claim for protection, -- not to such treatment as this" (239).¹² Evelina's location in this unsavory and immoral space taints her character as perceived by others, though according to the narrative, Evelina successfully persuades Willoughby of his mistake and, with her assumed chastity intact, is reunited with her party.

Throughout *Evelina*, Burney manipulates the narrative on multiple levels: as anonymous author, as "editor," and as the architect of Evelina's adventures. While we are reading the adventures of "a young lady's entrance into the world," we are more specifically reading Evelina's version of her adventures, as recounted in correspondence with her guardian, Rev. Mr. Villars.¹³ This version is suspect because she is filtering events to recount what her guardian *expects* to hear. Even more significantly, Burney is directing what Evelina filters. Consequently, we hear echoes of society's expectations, including the belief that proper young ladies possess the ability to innately perceive which spaces are safe and unsafe. Though Evelina repeatedly finds herself in unsafe spaces, according to her letters, her careful upbringing and good manners save her from

¹² Significantly, at the time of the exchange between Evelina and Willoughby, neither knows of the young woman's true heritage. If she had been known as the legitimate daughter Sir John Belmont, Willoughby would likely have resisted being so forward.

¹³ "A Young Lady's Entrance into the World" is the novel's subtitle.

terrible consequences. In the Vauxhall Gardens scene, then, we must consider how Rev. Mr. Villars's expectations of Evelina influence his adopted daughter's version of events (as well as how social expectations influence Burney's novel on a foundational level.)

When telling Villars about the Vauxhall misadventure, Evelina explains that she followed the Branghton sisters "quite by compulsion" (Burney 237), and upon their encountering the first group of rowdy young men, her fear and right instinct made her separate from her party and run: "I flew rather than ran up the walk, hoping to secure my safety by returning to the lights and company we had so foolishly left..." (238). This would be the appropriate response for a young lady misled into an inappropriate location, and it emphasizes that Evelina is acting alone: Not only does she lack the appropriate chaperonage, but the Branghton sisters do not strictly follow conduct codes and are not the best guides in social situations. In Evelina's version of events, she is the ingénue.

However, we, as readers, recognize that the genre of personal correspondence is suspect and fluid because of its subjectivity. Thus, the letters meant to assure Rev. Mr. Villars actually create anxiety for readers because we know that not everything is known. If Evelina's escapades in the Vauxhall alleys had turned out differently, or if circumstances or witnesses negated her relation of events in any way, she would have been "ruined."

Through her depiction of Evelina, Burney critiques the faulty social practices that judge and identify females.

Almost a century later, the veritable cornucopia of urban strata that Charles Dickens offers in *Dombey and Son* surpasses the attention that Burney pays to urban detail in *Evelina*. His cast of characters includes Dombey, who is positioned through

most of the novel as the epitome of patriarchal power; Florence, Dombey's quiet and neglected daughter; Mrs. Brown with her questionable reputation; and Alice, Good Mrs. Brown's daughter and a convicted prostitute. Though this novel is replete with examples of spatial rhetorics at play, I limit my discussion to two scenes that feature Florence Dombey because, as another young and innocent female, her experiences offer a counterpart to Evelina's.

In the first scene, young Florence—perhaps eight years old—is walking in the streets of London with her younger brother and both children are in the care of Susan, their nurse. With her chaperone, Florence can traverse the streets of London and view other ways of life that her status as a Dombey supposedly sheltered her from. “A wild confusion” scares Florence, and she instinctively runs from a melee of boys fighting and bulls misbehaving (Dickens, *Dombey* 69). When she comes to a stop, young and innocent Florence finds “with a sensation of terror not to be described” that she has been separated from her party. Dickens shows that, like Evelina, Florence lacks worldliness as the result of deficient guardianship; she also possesses childlike naïveté, an indulgence that children of the street could not afford. Despite this, however, Florence's fear works productively on multiple levels: Her character recognizes the chaos of the street as something to avoid, yet she also recognizes that being away from the chartered street is dangerous. Dickens establishes that, ideally, Florence and her party would have walked past the chaotic melee, without incident.

Florence's inability to handle the street's chaos leads her to a situation where she is alone. In the seconds after she realizes this and cries out for Susan, an old woman

approaches, which the reader might initially assume is the beginning of a kindly, “save the lost child” scene. Instead, almost immediately, we realize that this old woman is more witch than grandmother, and the narrator describes her as “very ugly...with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking” (Dickens, *Dombey* 69). Her appearance, along with the narrator’s allegation that the old woman “seemed to have followed Florence some little way,” establishes her as a disreputable character, and her refusal to let go of the child’s arm heightens suspicion (69). Significantly, Dickens locates this exchange on what is more “back road” than street, reminding us that, while cities are associated with crowds and exposure, hidden pockets in which illicit acts can occur do exist. The narrative generates uneasiness about the old woman’s motives for approaching Florence, and once we learn that her physical image mimics that of Hogarth’s bawd, this anxiety increases: What *is* going to happen to Florence?

Dickens again reminds us that Florence is only a child when the old woman persuades the girl to come with simply by identifying herself as “Good Mrs. Brown,” and promising that she knows Susan’s location. Florence’s lack of knowledge about navigating these urban spaces is underscored by her child-like ponderings of “whether Bad Mrs. Brown, if there were such a person, was at all like [Good Mrs. Brown]” (Dickens, *Dombey* 70). Her questionable chaperone leads Florence through an unfamiliar milieu of brick-fields and tile-yards before being led down a muddy lane to “a shabby little house, as closely shut up as a house that was full of cracks and crevices could be” (70). The locked door, which most city dwellings would have, seems ironic considering

the home's decrepit state. However, its locked state speaks to the social impetus to maintain boundaries, no matter how tenuously imagined.

Once inside the house, Mrs. Brown's hold over Florence increases; the child, scared speechless, finds herself in a furniture-less room with piles of rags, bones, and cinders in the floor. Mrs. Brown assures Florence that she will be released, but she threatens, "don't vex me. If you don't, I tell you I won't hurt you. But if you do, I'll kill you. I could have killed you at any time—even if you was in your own bed at home" (Dickens, *Dombey* 70). Dickens uses Mrs. Brown's promise to reiterate that no space, even the formidable Dombey house, can maintain impermeable boundaries. The old woman further controls Florence by quite literally stripping her of all the outward trappings that tell the world at large "where" the child belongs; Mrs. Brown appropriates Florence's frock, bonnet, and petticoats, giving her rags in return. Upon spying Florence's "luxurious" hair, the old woman "whipped out a large pair of scissors, and fell into an unaccountable state of excitement" (71). Her recollection of a daughter "beyond seas" thwarts her intent to sever the curls. Later in the novel, Dickens reveals that Mrs. Brown had pushed her daughter, Alice, into a life of vice, that included prostitution. After returning from an Australian penal colony, Alice recalls "how grave the judge was on her duty, and on her having perverted the gifts of nature—as if he didn't know better than anybody there, that they had been made curses to her!" (466-7). Dickens delays the revelation that it was the witch-like Mrs. Brown who first cursed her daughter's beauty and retroactively heightens the danger young Florence faced. This narrative move

emphasizes how a young girl can lose everything because of ignorance, and Florence simply did not know better than to go with Mrs. Brown.

When Mrs. Brown readies to release Florence, she once more uses her knowledge of the streets against the child. She leads her “changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys, which emerged, after a long time, upon a stable yard, with a gateway at the end, whence the roar of a great thoroughfare made itself audible” (Dickens, *Dombey* 72). The yonic-like imagery of Florence’s rebirthing into the public sphere cannot be overlooked; she is a different child entering this world—a raggedy urchin clutching a rabbit skin wandering through the bustling streets rather than the daughter of a powerful businessman.

Dickens again emphasizes Florence’s youth and naïveté through her fear that Mrs. Brown’s “potent eyes and ears” would be watching (*Dombey* 72). Florence vigilantly adheres to the demands, despite not really knowing the office’s location or how to navigate the crowd that passes by her without stopping, for “few people noticed her ...in the garb she wore: or if they did, believed that she was tutored to excite compassion” (73). Her exchange with a man at the wharf further illustrates the general and callous disregard for children of the streets: Florence asks, “If you please, is this the City?” And the man replies, “Ah! It’s the City. You know that well enough, I dare say. Be off! We haven’t got anything for you” (73). Only when she asks specifically about reaching Dombey and Son does the man take notice of her and call over “Dombey’s jockey,” Walter Gay, who helps Florence, taking her to his uncle’s home and going to Dombey’s to get proper clothes for her. Only after she is costumed once more as “Florence

Dombey,” dressed “with great care, in proper clothes,” can Florence return home (80). Dickens tidily ends her escapade in the streets, restoring Florence’s identity through Walter’s efforts. However, the question remains of what might have happened to Florence if the boy had not interceded: What events could have easily prevented her from rejoining the safety of the Dombey home?

The second scene, which serves as a bookend to the first, occurs much later in the novel, after Florence’s stepmother, Edith, leaves Dombey. This time, Dickens depicts Florence’s journey through the streets of London as relatively uneventful, a result of the knowledge gained from her childhood experience. She finds herself lost in the streets after running away. Florence had wanted to comfort her father after the loss of Edith and ran to hug him, “But in his frenzy, he lifted up his cruel arm, and struck her, crosswise, with that heaviness, that she tottered on the marble floor; and as he dealt the blow, he told her what Edith was, and bade her follow her, since they had always been in league” (Dickens, *Dombey* 632). The narrator says that in this moment, Florence realizes that “she had no father upon earth, and [she] ran out, orphaned, from his house” (632). However, though lost, she navigates the streets dressed as Florence Dombey, and her experience among the crowded and bustling street differs greatly from that of the first scene.

Passersby, rather than seeing calculated attempts to gain sympathy, exhibit “surprise and curiosity” and ask her “what the matter was” (Dickens, *Dombey* 633). As before, these approaches frighten Florence and make her self-conscious, but this time she is a young woman rather than a frightened child and realizes that she must warily make

her way somewhere: “She thought of the only other time she had been lost in the wide wilderness of London—though not lost as now—and went that way. To the home of Walter’s uncle” (633). Her dog Diogenes finds her, and together, they find their way to the city unmolested. Florence knows she is getting close as its “roar” gets louder and the people and places busier, “until she was carried onward in a stream of life that way, and flowing, indifferently, past marts and mansions, prisons, churches, market-places, wealth, poverty, good, and evil...” (634). The narrator limits the details of Florence’s journey through the indiscriminate city streets, but when she arrives, she collapses. While Florence was able to find her own way, she lacks the ability to fully interact in the public realm. In turn, this exhibition of helplessness and dependency secures Florence a place in what is now the home of Captain Cuttle since Walter’s uncle is at sea.

Through Evelina and Florence’s experiences, Burney and Dickens illustrate how identity is often assigned based on appearance and location. Though Evelina was not a prostitute, her presence in the dark alleys of Vauxhall fostered that assumption. When Mrs. Brown discovered Florence in the isolated street, the child was vulnerable to the old woman’s whims, and while Florence is not accused of prostitution, passersby who saw her “raggedy” guise definitely believed that she was a child of the street and subject to its subsequent fate. These fictional narratives influence readers’ internalizations of these spaces—dark alleys become perilous and witch-like women lurk near children who are not properly supervised. These textual moments configure these spaces as dangerous. Though the narratives resolve favorably for Evelina and Florence, the anxiety generated by the characters’ “near-misses” persists. Females who found themselves in spaces

constructed as unsafe are susceptible to dangerous (i.e. public and sexual) situations, while females who remained in “safe” spaces were not. This logic influenced the push to contain “contagious” prostitutes because if segregated and confined, prostitutes could not infect otherwise safe spaces with physical and moral disease: “Good” women would be safe.

As a response to these social concerns, the CDAs presumably offered a way to ameliorate the prostitution problem by legislating the physical control and containment of suspected prostitutes. The very intent of the CDAs bespeaks of their reliance upon spatial constructs in locating and relocating prostitutes. Under the aegis of the CDAs, females identified as prostitutes were subject to compulsory physical examinations; if found to be infected with venereal disease, they would be remanded to a certified lock hospital or ward until pronounced “clean.” If not infected, they would be registered, released, and ordered to undergo regular examinations. Prostitutes who did not comply with their treatment faced incarceration for up to four months. This regulatory system, a direct attempt to assuage contagion anxieties about the prostitute, purposed to identify, define, and relegate these disorderly and unsexed female bodies.

However, the CDA system possessed serious flaws that served to aggravate rather than calm social anxieties. For instance, the Contagious Diseases Prevention Act of 1864, the first in the legislation series, decreed that a woman could be brought before a Justice if she were thought to be an infected, common prostitute: “If any common Prostitute is in any public place, within the Limits of any Place to which this Act applies, for the Purpose of Prostitution, any Superintendent or Inspector of Police or Constabulary authorized to

act in that Place, having good Cause to believe that such common Prostitute has a Contagious Disease...” (3).¹⁴ While this Act set the parameters for the physical apprehension and restraint of suspected prostitutes, it did not (and could not) clarify who *was* a prostitute—as in, what characteristics and criteria indisputably marked a female body as a prostitute? Instead, the bill called for women who *appeared* to be prostitutes and who were seen in specified locales.¹⁵

The vague language of the bill speaks to the impossibility of establishing a credible classification system to identify prostitutes, and the result of this flimsy rhetoric was, to some degree, chaos. The evidence used to accuse females of prostitution was often circumstantial and solely based upon their geographic location and physical appearance. Factory girls, seamstresses, and females who were simply poorly dressed found themselves susceptible to accusation because of their attire and/or location. For instance, a factory girl on her way to or from work was likely to pass through less-than-respectable areas; between her location and dress, she might be implicated as a prostitute.¹⁶ This criteria exacerbated fears that, as Nord put it, “‘bad’ women and ‘good’ women were interchangeable” (11). Even Florence Nightingale remarked upon the potential for mistaken identity in a May 1864 letter to Harriet Martineau: “I don’t believe any House of Commons will pass [the first CDA]. Any honest girl might be locked up all

¹⁴ The Bill specifies, “The term ‘public Place’ means a Thoroughfare or other public Street or Place, or a Room or other Place of public Resort” (1).

¹⁵ *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online* includes a schedule with the CD Act of 1864. It lists the places as Portsmouth, Plymouth, Woolwich, Chatham, Sheerness, Aldershot &c.&c. and includes their limits.

¹⁶ For a detailed social profile of Victorian prostitutes that includes discussion of non-prostitutes and the circumstances that led to the charge as well as the aftermath of their examination and/or hearing, see Walkowitz’s *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

night by mistake by it” (McDonald 451).¹⁷ As the case of *Evelina* shows, transgression of physical, spatial boundaries, such as those between the domestic sphere and the public sphere, merited a change in figurative location as well. In dominant society’s view, a female “located” on a dark street at a late hour while walking from the factory was just as likely to be looking to engage in sex-for-hire. While the fallaciousness of this logic seems obvious, texts from across social realms employed the prostitute figure to represent women dislocated, by choice and by force, from their “proper” location in the domestic sphere. The CDAs fully replicated these ideas.

As participants in and products of Victorian sociopolitical discourse, the CDAs represent linguistic and social power. Public and private spaces are constructed by the patriarchy, and identity is defined through relationship with space; therefore, identity is defined by the patriarchy.¹⁸ The CDA of 1864 followed this logic, imbuing the Justice with the power to determine “who” is a prostitute: “If it is proved to the *Satisfaction of such Justice* that the Woman so brought before him is a common Prostitute...” (emphasis added, 3). A vested representative of the patriarchy, the Justice passes judgment on the suspected prostitute, as did the “Superintendant or Inspector of Police or Constabulary” who detains her. The Justice is authorized to first judge if she is a prostitute and diseased, and if she is both, to then rule as to her awareness of being infected. A prostitute proven to be unaware of her infected status would likely be remanded to a certified hospital

¹⁷ Recognition of the proposal’s ineffective identification process failed to outweigh anxieties about the spread of prostitution, and the first CDA received the royal assent in July 1864. However, see McHugh 37 for more about its introduction, which took place in “a thin house, late at night.”

¹⁸ See Wilson 150 for a discussion of the “anti-urban ideology” predicated upon “a fear of the loss of patriarchal control over women.”

where she would be confined until pronounced cured. A prostitute determined to be aware of carrying venereal disease faced imprisonment for knowingly endangering society. In both cases, the Justice retains the power to ascribe an identity to the woman, as well as a place and a function.

Such regulatory power was extended even further in the Contagious Disease Act of 1866, which included additional provisions that specified protocols for prostitutes' submission to compulsory examinations. An intricate paperwork system charted the women's commission to hospital, the status of their examination, and their stage of confinement or release. As a legislated, mandatory process, the CDAs imbued chosen officials with the power to order, confine, and release suspected prostitutes as needed. The control of prostitutes amounted to a control of their space. Ideally, prostitutes could only "work" when disease-free, and under the CDAs, they could be remanded for examination and/or confinement and/or imprisonment at any time, as determined by agents of the patriarchy.

However, the regulatory system was crucially flawed, most significantly in the process of regulation itself. In May 1871, *The Day's Doings*, a New York periodical, ran an illustration titled "Prostitutes Bribing Beadle in Burlington Park." The image depicts a uniformed beadle at his post and looking stolidly ahead as two well-dressed women slip money into his hand. This illustration speaks to the issues of class raised by the CDAs: Only women who "looked" like prostitutes were guaranteed regulation, while well-kept prostitutes with means could thwart regulation through bribery. Though the CDAs were abolished in 1886, they reflected and profoundly affected ideologies of British society for

twenty-two years. That the legislation series ever passed secures its status as artifact of Victorian contagion anxieties. The bills invoked the prostitute as a shadowy and vague figure and an exemplum for all disorderly females: Disorder of any kind was but a step away from prostitution. This conflation disregarded the individual while undermining the social body and its fears of transitory states and the successful masking of disease.

Though these governing documents intended to stabilize the social body, they disrupted instead, further engraining cultural beliefs about space and identity that were often contradictory and unsupportable.

In the chapters that follow, I examine texts from the genres of newspaper articles, medical treatises, and fiction that were published between 1855 and 1875, the heyday of the contagious disease controversy. I work to uncover the discursive social practices that mark them as both production and producer of contagion anxieties as illustrated by the prostitute. This study of Victorian rhetorics, of genres that make claims about prostitution, establishes how a pervasive rhetoric of contagion infiltrated texts across social realms. I argue that genre, professionalization, and identity are crucially linked, as a discipline's developing genres work in tandem with its evolving professionalization. The texts produced during the process of specializing carry a degree of social authority that can influence rhetorics of space and identity. My interdisciplinary project scrutinizes how texts produced within different genres rhetorically construct the prostitute, using her as a navigational marker that guides readers' formation of knowledge about spaces and identities.

In chapter two, “Reporting the Prostitute,” I turn my attention to Victorian newspapers as artifacts and sites of inquiry. I study how selected issues of *The London Times* and *The Daily News* organize and share information about the prostitute. This data, disseminated through recognizable and socially authoritative media channels, performs a mapping of the prostitute. Through portrayals of material space, newspapers function as social instruments, employing the prostitute as a navigational marker that directs how readers create knowledge about physical spaces. Representations may portray locations as infected with prostitutes and/or containing prostitutes, each of which elicit a range of responses from readers, including contagion anxieties. These interactions between constructions of space, identity, and rhetorics of professionalization crucially link genre (newspaper as artifact), identity (prostitute, who could be implicated as both reader and subject of news stories), and professionalization (field of journalism).

I follow my discussion of Victorian newspapers with “William Acton’s Prescription for the Contagious Prostitute.” Chapter three traces further the association between contagion and prostitution and examines how Acton’s treatises on prostitution respond to contagion anxieties about the prostitute, prostitution, and venereal disease. The texts establish claims about the medical professional’s authority while reconfiguring public and private space to advocate for the control and containment of the prostitute. Such literal and metaphorical moves would, it was believed, preserve health and morality, protecting society from the disease and dis-ease disseminated by the dangerous prostitute. My discussion examines the first and second editions of *Prostitution*, published respectively in 1857 and 1870, as artifacts of the socio-political climate in

which they were produced. Each illustrates the tensions between identity and situation typical to their temporal context within nineteenth-century discourse about prostitution. Acton's rhetoric employs the prostitute as a point of conflict, encouraging his readers to simultaneously locate the prostitute within and outside of society.

After ascertaining the ways that the newspaper and medical treatise genres employ rhetorics of space in their constructions of the prostitute, chapter four, "Sensation and Anxiety in *The New Magdalen*," examines how, as sensation fiction, Wilkie Collins's narrative constructs the prostitute as figure of danger and instability. When read through the lens of contagion anxieties, the narrative, in its serial, novel, and dramatic forms, reflects the intersections among portrayals of space, constructions of identity, and professional rhetorics. A close reading of Mercy Merrick, the main character and a former prostitute, reveals how portrayals of space and identity guide the reader's formation of knowledge. Mercy's repeated locations and dislocations prevent a "true" relocation from taking place, a sequence that mimics the perpetual displacement of the prostitute within Victorian society.

Chapter five, "An Infected Tradition: Writing the Prostitute" concludes the dissertation by re-examining conventional literary representations of the prostitute through the lens of spatial rhetorics. I examine how select nineteenth-century women writers rhetorically used the prostitute and contributed to the evolving cultural conversation about "disorderly" women and prostitution. I pay particular attention to Elizabeth Gaskell, closely reading *Mary Barton*, *Lizzie Leigh*, and *Ruth* to discern how they respond to contagion anxieties as illustrated by the prostitute. For example, each text

employs portrayals of materials space—from Upclose Farm to Mrs. Mason’s workroom—to make claims about female identity. Finally, I argue that through interdisciplinary readings and engagement with multiple modes of inquiry, the study of spatial rhetorics reveals the textual mappings that affect how we internalize information and generate knowledge. This revelation enables a heightened awareness of how we rhetorically engage in the interpretation and (re)production of social mapping.

CHAPTER II

REPORTING THE PROSTITUTE

...understanding news as culture requires asking what categories of people count as ‘who,’ what kinds of things pass as ‘whats,’ what geography and what sense of time are inscribed as ‘where’ and ‘when,’ and what counts as an exploration of why.

– Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (1995)

The Press lives by disclosures; whatever passes into its keeping becomes a part of the knowledge and the history of our times.

– Robert Lowe, *The Times* (6 February 1852)

Though Victorian newspapers are artifacts of their time, reflecting and participating in the formation of discursive social practices, scholars have “[tended] to see newspapers as sources of historical information rather than artefacts in their own right” (Williams, *Read 2*).¹⁹ Examining these artifacts exposes the ideological networks that influence conceptions of identity and space. Terhi Rantanen argues, “Too much has been written about the objectivity of news and too little about news as a cultural, economic, and social good whose temporal and spatial features keep changing” (xi). Considering newspapers as goods or artifacts marks them as sites of inquiry about the

¹⁹ Recent scholarship (see Brake or Rubery) has been enhanced by the increasing breadth of digital archives, enabling study of “print culture,” a term that “encompassed a range of textual artifacts including newspapers, magazines, and other miscellaneous forms of print” (Rubery 291). While this broader scope has generated much useful scholarship, the narrower lens of the Victorian newspaper best suits my project.

way knowledge is organized and shared in the public sphere, which also offers insights into the context surrounding their existence as product and process. Kevin Williams explains, “Different eras have their own cultural, social, economic and political imperatives which impact on the newspaper and determine form and appearance, what appears in the pages, how content is produced, the way in which people understand its role in society and its relationship with other social actors” (*Read* 15). Victorian newspapers uniquely mapped locations of the prostitute while interacting with constructions of space and identity and rhetorics of professionalization. This chapter analyzes these mappings and interactions.

The nineteenth-century press wielded significant power, influencing the populace as well as politics and policy: Newspapers had become “the channel between public opinion and governing institutions...[and] served the establishment by being a means of social control, deflecting grievances into the peaceful, ‘constitutional’ medium of the newspaper column, and they served democracy by acting as a security against despotism” (Clarke, B. 231). Journalism’s reach, and the accessibility of newspapers to all social classes, created a new “beast”: mass communication. The expansive replication of thoughts and ideas connected and challenged society in new ways. In “The Newspaper Press,” published in the October 1855 *Edinburgh Review*, W.R. Greg described journalism’s scope and effect as “truly an estate of the realm”:

[Journalism] furnishes the daily reading of millions. It furnishes the exclusive reading of hundreds of thousands. Not only does it supply the nation with nearly all the information on public topics which it possesses, but it supplies it with its notions and opinions in addition. It furnishes not only the materials on which our

conclusions must be founded: it furnishes the conclusions themselves, cut and dried—coined, stamped, and polished. It inquires, reflects, decides for us... (44-5)

Greg described journalism as an ideological force impacting the formation of knowledge on individual and collective levels. The correlation between knowledge development (i.e. identity development) and the press encouraged a correlation between civil liberties (i.e. development of the individual) and freedom of the press. In an 1862 speech, Victor Hugo acknowledged this connection, declaring, “The diameter of the press is the diameter of civilization” (10). The image of the nineteenth-century press invoked by Greg and Hugo illustrates what Mark Hampton calls the “educational ideal,” a view of the press that interpreted it as a “powerful agent for improving individuals” (9). These beliefs underscored the development of the nineteenth-century press as its influence and power advanced.

To facilitate the growth of the nineteenth-century press, the newspaper had to be accessible to its audience. As a physical product, mid-Victorian newspapers were printed on rag paper, “clearly printed and physically tough,” allowing them to be shared and passed along (Brown 27).²⁰ Newspapers typically took the form of a broadsheet or tabloid. There were no set sections, besides, perhaps, advertising and lead articles; letters to the editor, for instance, would be inserted wherever space allowed (Clarke, B. 229). Compared to today’s newspaper layouts, which include color inks, graphics, artfully arranged text, and complex advertisements, nineteenth-century newspapers appear plain, yet they were exercises in economy. A simple layout was followed – typically, each

²⁰ By century’s end, newspapers were printed on less-sturdy and cheaper paper.

“page of a newspaper was seen as a page of letterpress” (Brown 22). Advertising was important, however, “bringing in about half the revenue of the Victorian newspaper” (17). Advertisements, like the one pictured below for William Acton’s *Prostitution*, were typically simple and brief as anything more elaborate was “felt to be objectionable” (22).

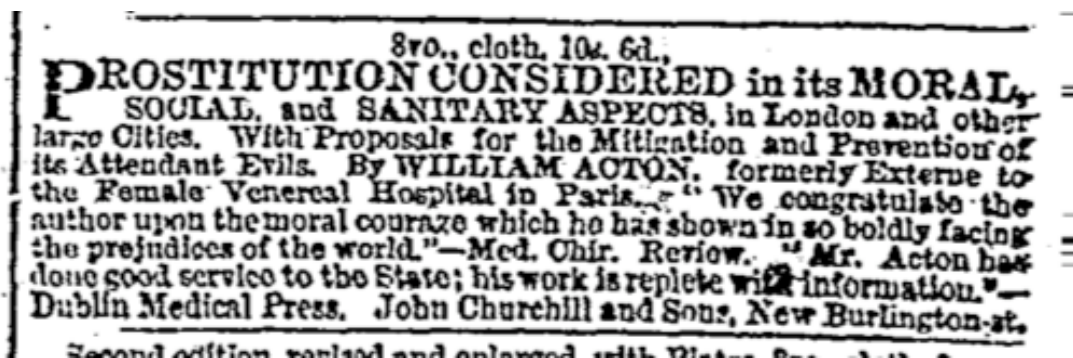


Figure 3: Advertisement for Acton’s *Prostitution* (*The Times*)

Brown posits that some newspapers avoided running display advertisements in order to position themselves as higher “quality” than newspapers running ads for “cough cures and underwear” (22). *The London Times* similarly avoided large advertisements and ran pages of small ones like Acton’s advertisement above. Then, as now, opinions about advertising varied between newspapers; some, like *The Daily News*, had no problem running larger ads.

Though print newspapers today bear little physical resemblance to their Victorian forebears, the basic idea of what we define as “news” remains the same: “‘The news’ as we understand it is a nineteenth-century creation. It is a package of information on diverse subjects, some appearing for the first time, some the most recent developments of

long-running stories: the package is delivered at the same time to the great body of people, and forms the subject-matter of public debate” (Brown 1). Immediacy was necessary, and networks of foreign correspondents, news agencies, and developing technologies ensured the immediate dispersal of information. This process influenced the commercialization of news, which occurred in the nineteenth century: “News received its value...because it was non-durable and consumed instantly” (Rantanen 46). As a consumable good, news was internalized, influencing its readers’ processing of knowledge. Hence, “news” conveyed more than information: It conveyed facts and ideas that, in part, influenced conceptions of place and, thereby, space.

The very structure of a newspaper engages with spatial rhetorics. A banner, often emblazoned with a geographic place-name, like *The London Times* or *The Edinburgh Review*, identified the newspaper’s source, while a dateline and/or headline established the story’s point-of-origin. Such markers initiated an exchange with readers: “[Readers of nineteenth-century news] knew their place, they stayed at home, but the news invited them to ‘change the scenery.’ The first place-name in any news story proffered this invitation” (Rantanen 86-7). The dateline/headline spoke to a traditional understanding of geography, if the reader had first-hand knowledge of the referenced place. If the reader lacked this detailed knowledge, then the dateline/headline spoke to their conceptions of the place—to a phenomenological geography. Declaring a local tie formed an immediate connection between the reader and newspaper; this bond then participates in the “[construction of] the location and identification of places,” functioning as both product (consumable news) and process (social influence) (87).

In a very real sense, then, Victorian newspapers mapped their territories, shaping them through reports of local, national, and international happenings. Newspapers are products of their locations, generating news that both reflects and defines their invoked communities and, thus, are inextricably linked to their “social circumstances,” establishing fluid relationships that “vary across time” (Williams, K. *Read* 15). From the datelines/headlines to the articles themselves, newspaper content influenced Victorian understandings about how spaces were defined, how inhabitants of those spaces were identified, and how the spaces functioned: “If we are to think about how news connects people, place is an essential element, because it is, as Heidegger says, ‘the locale of being in the world’” (qtd. in Rantanen 78). However, the role of place in media and communication studies only garnered attention recently. Some of these studies take a more traditional approach to analyzing space, such as David Herzog’s 2003 *Mapping the News*, which explores the connections between news and Geographic Information Systems. Others counter and test those traditions. Terhi Rantanen, for instance, argues in her 2009 *When News was New*, “Not only have communication researchers ignored ‘where,’ but they have understood ‘where’ in a rather conventional way” (76). She proposes an alternative approach to traditional studies of constructions of place, stating, “geography can be constructed phenomenologically as a study of the relationships between people and the world they live in” (78). Studying “the geography inside people’s heads” offers a new way of exposing how media influences internalizations of space, including its inhabitants, how it is defined, and what it does (Crang 11).

I am interested in how Victorian newspapers constructed the prostitute and to what ends. As products of culture that produced an understanding of culture, newspapers employed the prostitute as both subject and directional marker. While readers would, of course, want to know about the criminal activity within the physical parameters of the newspaper's scope, stories about the prostitute served to direct attention and to influence assumptions about place. For example, a newspaper that repeatedly runs stories about prostitution in Aldershot suggests a connection between the act and the place: In the minds of readers, Aldershot becomes synonymous with prostitution. This process occurs on multiple levels with different subjects throughout the history of the newspaper. Victorian newspapers employing the prostitute as a marker influenced readers' judgments of place and participated in the discursive social practices, (re)iterating rhetorics of prostitution.

My project specifically reads newspapers as social instruments that, in their portrayals of material space, use the prostitute as a navigational marker that guides readers' formation of knowledge about place. This process of association crucially links genre (newspaper as artifact), identity (prostitute, who could be implicated as reader and subject of news stories), and professionalization (field of journalism). Newspaper articles map space textually, producing periplois that influenced cultural beliefs about the prostitute's identity and her haunts; I seek to explore selected periplois in *The London Times* and *The Daily News*. To these ends, I first provide an overview of the periodicals from 1855 to 1875, a span that frames the editions of Acton's *Prostitution*. My focus then narrows from 1862 to 1866, a span that encompasses the first Contagious Disease Act,

which passed in 1864. I discuss selected issues and stories to expose how their dissemination of “news” connects perceptions of space and the prostitute. I examine how *The London Times*’s portrayal of physical spaces—Marylebone and Aldershott, in particular—reflects and engages these social practices. I then turn my attention to *The Daily News*, comparing its treatment of Marylebone and Aldershott to *The London Times*’s, and examining its portrayal of the Haymarket. Finally, I address the rhetorics of professionalization that these periodicals engage in through their depictions of the prostitute.

The London Times

Founded in 1775 as the *Daily Universal Register*, *The London Times*, renamed in 1778, was “by far the most successful newspaper for most of the nineteenth century” (Clarke, B. 225).²¹ This success was due in large part to John Walter II, who took over management of the paper from his father in 1803; Walter enlisted a strong network of foreign correspondents, invested in printing technology, and appointed Thomas Barnes editor in 1817 (225-6). Bob Clarke asserts, “[Walter] did not see *The Times* as a vehicle for propagating his own views. His role was to establish the necessary infrastructure to enable the paper to expand, and to leave journalism to the journalists...he ensured the supremacy of *The Times*” (226). Barnes established *The Times* as “the voice of middle-class England, in favour of reform, but fearful of violent revolution” (227). He savvily negotiated changes in political tides and, by his death in 1841, “had increased the sales of

²¹ In keeping with convention, I refer to *The London Times* as *The Times*.

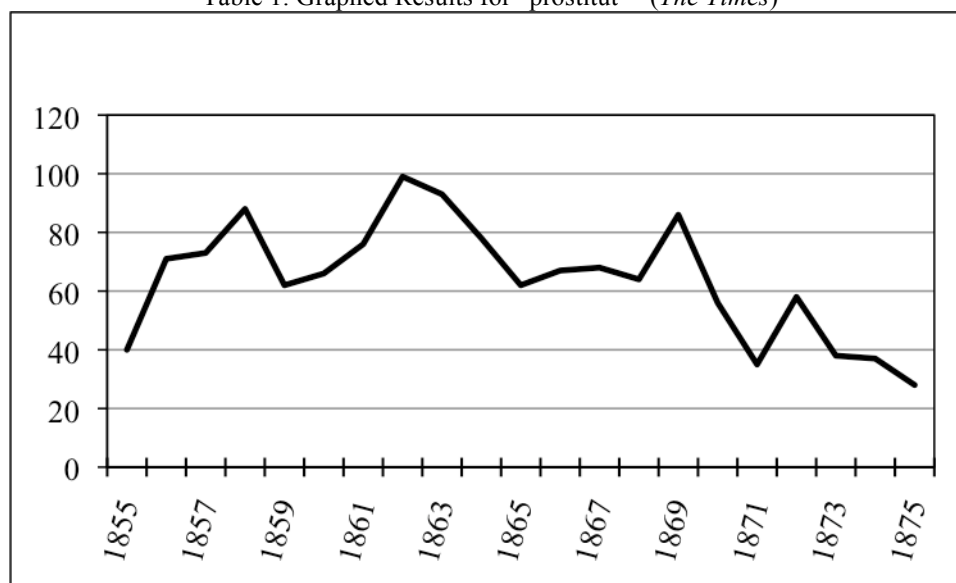
The Times from 7,000 to 28,000, more than double that of the nearest daily rival” (228). Its physical size had also increased, becoming a six-columned, eight-page broadsheet. John Delane succeeded Barnes, and increased the newspaper’s circulation to 65,000 copies per day before his death in 1877 (229). Clarke claims, “Under Delane *The Times* became the only paper that was essential reading on political matters” (229-30). During Delane’s editorship, the “virtual monopoly” of *The Times* narrowed the views represented to those of its “natural constituency, the powerful and newly enfranchised middle class” (231). During the Crimean War, *Times* correspondents’ stories of gross negligence within the administration of the British Army impacted public opinion about “aristocratic maladministration in the army” (232); expectedly, those impugned by these stories took umbrage. In 1855, the year after the incriminating Crimean stories, the government abolished the stamp duty. *The Times* was directly impacted by the tax’s abolishment; as the heaviest paper, its postage cost more. This increase, along with other expenses, such as the paper’s extensive foreign correspondence network, affected *The Times*’s finances. As a result, its grip on the market weakened (239). The Parnell forgeries in 1887 undermined the paper’s credibility and incurred heavy legal expenses; *The Times* never recovered.²²

The success of *The Times*, and its subsequent social power, makes its participation in Victorian discourse about prostitution worthy of scrutiny. According to Bob Clarke, “By the mid-1850s, *The Times* was selling over seven times as many copies as its nearest

²² In 1887, *The Times* printed a letter supposedly written by Irish Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell that condoned the Phoenix Park Murders. The letter, however, was a forgery, and its run discredited the paper. See B. Clarke 241.

rival daily paper and more than twice the five morning papers put together” (230). In addition to financial success, these large circulation numbers indicate the newspaper’s large audience, which was composed of the rising middle classes (Williams, K. *Get* 10). Benedict Anderson discusses how newspaper reading represents a ceremony, one that is repeated and replicated every day, throughout the community about which the newspaper reports (34-6). In this environment, repetition of subject and context plays a significant role in forming ideas about identity and space. Therefore, to gauge *The Times*’s treatment of prostitutes and prostitution, I searched twenty years’ worth of archives for occurrences of the terms. Table 1 graphs the results of a search for “prostitut*” in the online archives.

Table 1. Graphed Results for “prostitut*” (*The Times*)



During my timeframe of 1855 to 1875, there are noticeable peaks and depressions, with the most significant peaks occurring in 1862 and 1863, which yielded 99 and 93 results

respectively. In 1862, there were nine mentions in Editorial & Commentary and 90 in News; in 1863, there was one mention in Advertising, five in Editorial & Commentary, 85 in News, and two in Features. The use of “prostitute” or “prostitution” or “prostitutes” can only be verified by analyzing each article in the two-decade span individually, though, and despite the occasional use of prostitute as a verb (in the sense of, for example, admonitions against politicians who “prostitute” themselves), it remains significant that the terms’ occurrence peaks immediately prior to the first CDA’s passing. In that year, 1864, 78 results were returned, and the term(s) presence was more pervasive across categories, showing up in Advertising (two), Editorial & Commentary (10), News (62), Business (one), Features (two), and People (one).

I executed targeted searches of the archives within the 1862 to 1866 frame, breaking down the searches by year (see Tables 2-4). The search returns for “prostitute” are represented in Table 2. The News (Law) category yielded the greatest results for all five years. Searches for “prostitutes” (Table 3) and “prostitution” (Table 4) also returned the highest number of hits in the News (Law) category. In all three searches, 1864 presents the widest spread of results, with hits resulting in multiple categories. It should be noted that the Advertising results largely refer to ads for Acton’s treatise on prostitution. Not surprisingly, the “Features” articles are not “features” in the modern-day sense; instead, they are reviews of various subjects, from theatre to the Bank Act. The majority of articles sorted into the “Features” category are false returns as their use of “prostitute,” “prostitutes,” or “prostitution” rarely refers to women or the sex trade. Instead, the usage is often in the form of “This company will not prostitute itself.”

Table 2. “prostitute” results (*The Times*)

| | Editorial & Commentary | News (News) | News (Law) | News (Politics & Parliament) | Features (Reviews) | Business (Shipping News) | Advertising | Total |
|------|---------------------------|-------------|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------|
| 1862 | 3 | 4 | 27 | - | - | - | - | 34 |
| 1863 | 2 | 2 | 35 | - | - | - | - | 39 |
| 1864 | - | 2 | 19 | - | 1 | - | - | 22 |
| 1865 | - | 2 | 17 | 1 | - | - | - | 20 |
| 1866 | - | 3 | 14 | - | - | - | - | 17 |

Table 3. “prostitutes” results (*The Times*)

| | Editorial & Commentary | News (News) | News (Law) | News (Politics & Parliament) | Features (Reviews) | Business (Shipping News) | Advertising | Total |
|------|---------------------------|-------------|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------|
| 1862 | 2 | 11 | 35 | 1 | - | - | - | 49 |
| 1863 | - | 2 | 30 | - | 2 | - | - | 34 |
| 1864 | 4 | 4 | 25 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 36 |
| 1865 | - | 6 | 17 | 1 | - | - | - | 24 |
| 1866 | 4 | 9 | 16 | - | - | - | - | 29 |

Table 4. “prostitution” results (*The Times*)

| | Editorial & Commentary | News (News) | News (Law) | News (Politics & Parliament) | Features (Reviews) | Business (Shipping News) | Advertising | Total |
|------|---------------------------|-------------|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------|
| 1862 | 2 | 3 | 18 | 1 | - | - | - | 24 |
| 1863 | 1 | 1 | 13 | - | - | - | - | 14 |
| 1864 | 3 | 1 | 9 | - | 1 | - | 2 | 16 |
| 1865 | 3 | 1 | 10 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 16 |
| 1866 | 1 | 4 | 11 | - | 1 | - | 2 | 19 |

Within the search results for prostitute/prostitutes/prostitution, certain patterns emerged: Specifically, several place names repeatedly showed up, including Clerkenwell, Marlborough-Street, Marylebone, and Aldershott.²³ I chose “Marylebone” and “Aldershott” for closer study and executed searches targeted to these geographic locations; Table 5 shows the data returned by those searches. As the results show, for the selected time frame of 1862-1866, articles in *The Times* connected the place names with the individual (prostitute) rather than the act (prostitution). This trend suggests that the spatial narrative constructed by *The Times* and distributed to its readers rendered Marylebone and Aldershott as locales of prostitutes. This rendering derives partly from physical evidence about the prostitute population that makes the association between space and inhabitants logical. However, this rendering also evidences Rantanen and

²³ I use the common nineteenth-century spelling variation of “Aldershott” rather than the contemporary spelling of “Aldershot.”

Table 5. Marylebone and Aldershott Comparison (*The Times*)

| | Marylebone (News) | Marylebone and prostitute or prostitutes (News) | Marylebone and prostitution (News) | Aldershott (news) | Aldershott and prostitute or prostitutes (News) | Aldershott and prostitution (News) |
|------|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 1862 | 91 | 48 | 1 | 53 | 47 | 2 |
| 1863 | 97 | 34 | 0 | 55 | 33 | 0 |
| 1864 | 79 | 33 | 0 | 35 | 30 | 0 |
| 1865 | 58 | 24 | 0 | 38 | 25 | 0 |
| 1866 | 106 | 25 | 0 | 49 | 25 | 0 |

Crang's ideas about phenomenological geography: The prostitute, identified in these articles as "belonging" to and in certain physical spaces, serves as a navigational marker that directs the reader's internalization of knowledge about Marylebone and Aldershott. She also becomes marked, through articles' rhetorical positioning, as a vector of degeneration and disorder.

The Marylebone District, home to the Central Railway Depot and Regent's Park, including almost the entirety of the Zoological Gardens, represented a cross-section of London.²⁴ The map depicted in Figure 4, taken from *The Fascination of London*:

²⁴ Tracing the etymology of "Marylebone," D. Lysons wrote in 1795, "The name of this place was anciently called Tiburn, from its situation near a small bourn, or rivulet, formerly called Ayebrook, or Eyebrook, and now Tybourn-brook. When the site of the church was altered to another spot near the same brook, it was called... St. Mary at the bourn, now corrupted to St. Mary le bone, or Marybone" (242). In

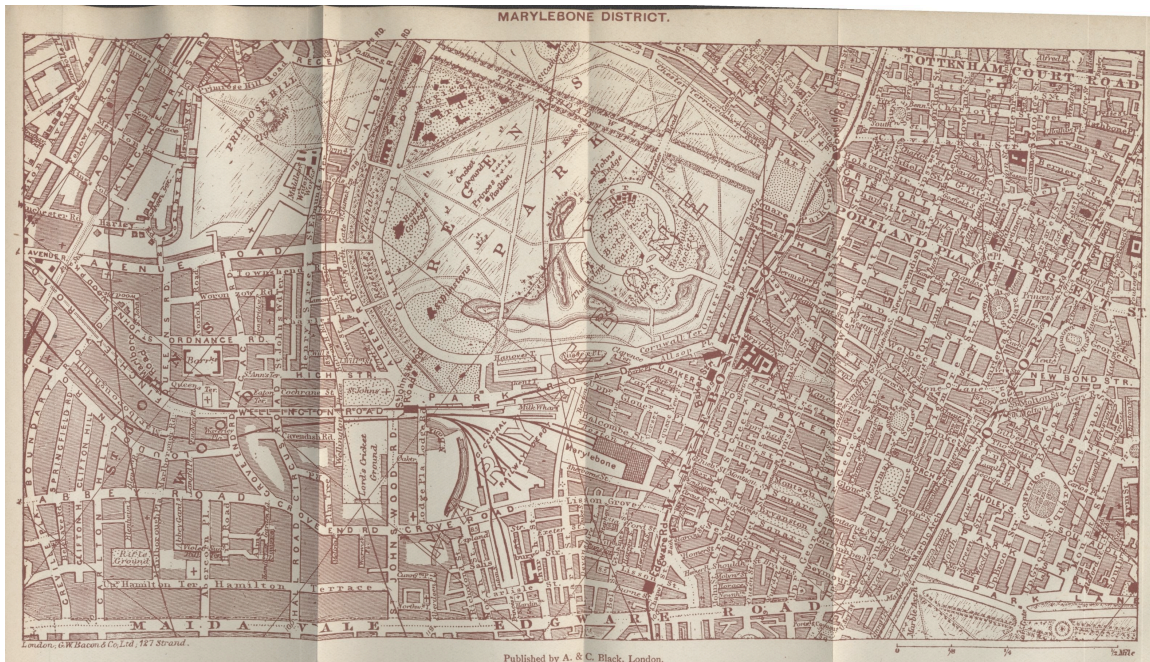
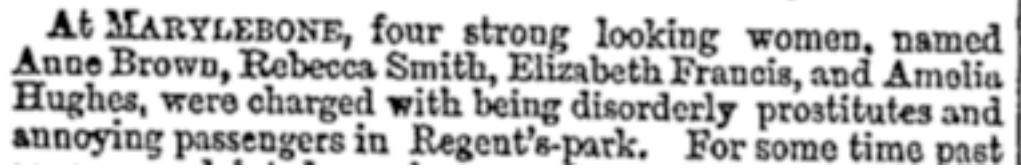


Figure 4. Map of Nineteenth-Century Marylebone from Mitton's *The Fascination of London*

Hampstead and Marylebone, depicts the district during the nineteenth-century. A bustling neighborhood, with shops, respectable homes, and architectural landmarks, Marylebone was more diverse than areas like Westminster. The presence of the railway station ensured a mobile population that included respectable travelers and those who existed on the margins of society, like prostitutes. Headlines/datelines that identified Marylebone as the location of the news event suggested a connection between the physical space and the subject of the contents. And though a plain and subtle design (and not very headline-like) by twenty-first century standards, in *The Times*'s format, these headlines did draw

1902, G.E. Mitton clarified, "There is a possibility that the "bourne" did not indicate the brook, but the boundary of the parish, in which case Marybone would still be a corruption of St. Mary at the Bourne (56).



At MARYLEBONE, four strong looking women, named Anne Brown, Rebecca Smith, Elizabeth Francis, and Amelia Hughes, were charged with being disorderly prostitutes and annoying passengers in Regent's-park. For some time past

Figure 5. “Marylebone” Article Headline (*The Times*)

attention. The immediacy of beginning with a place name was as relevant in the nineteenth century as it is today, attracting readers personally invested in Marylebone and strengthening their associative bond. Meanwhile, for readers unfamiliar with Marylebone, the articles offered a rendering of the unknown place that works as a periplum, guiding the internalization of information. While this transaction works regardless of topic, I focus on how invocations of place generated connections between the prostitute and specific locations.

Out of the numerous articles about Marylebone that I reviewed, I selected four to closely examine their rhetorical presentation of the prostitute. A January 5, 1865 article recounts crimes allegedly committed by “Mary Anne Paul, aged 17, a prostitute.” The article’s language depicts the social dynamics that establish the prostitute as “less-than” other members of society. For example, Paul, “charged on remand with annoying men in the Euston-road, and...also charged with committing an assault on Mr. Charles Thomas,” is portrayed as the agent of disorder (“Marylebone—Mary” 9). In contrast, the related testimonies establish Thomas as a moral citizen, simply resisting the disorder threatened by Paul. First, an eyewitness, a police constable, testifies, “[Paul] stopped Mr. Thomas, who refused to speak to her, and pushed her on one side. She again made up to him, and

was again repulsed. The woman then took mud from the road and threw it at Mr. Thomas” (9). The “victim” also gives his account, which is recounted in third person: “[Thomas] was on his return from a friend’s house when he was stopped by the female prisoner, who requested him to go home with her, or else to stop and talk. He declined to do either, pushed her on to one side, and walked on. The prisoner and her companions then threw mud at him...” (9). Both testimonies expose the social chasm between the victim and his alleged assailant: Paul is of such low consequence that Thomas can push her—and both he and the constable can testify to that effect—without fear of repercussion, not even disapproval. Thomas was simply putting Paul in her place.

Along with her lack of social consequence, the article emphasizes Paul’s lack of character by including testimony, in response to a pointed question on the subject, from the constable that “the female prisoner and other young prostitutes prowl along the Euston and Hampstead roads nightly, stopping and molesting male passengers” (“Marylebone—Mary” 9). The use of “prowl,” which conjures associations of animals hunting prey, underscores the unacceptability of these behaviors. Paul’s pathology is cemented by her lack of physical witnesses: “Mr. Yardley said (addressing the prisoners) that this was just as he suspected” (9). In its depiction of Paul, this article (re)iterates commonplaces about the prostitute, including defining her by assumptions of her inherent lack—of character, station, and honor.

When examined in conjunction with other *Times* articles, the story about Paul is part of a narrative suggested about Marylebone, particularly in the less-posh areas surrounding Regent’s Park, where “gangs of women” roamed and prowled at night,

“annoying passengers” (“At Marylebone, four” 9). These women are often portrayed as aggressive and are sometimes identified specifically as “disorderly prostitutes” who are annoying the public (9). Twenty-year-old Jane Scotty, for instance, recently out of prison, was sentenced “to one month’s hard labour as a disorderly prostitute” after being found guilty of “annoying and soliciting passengers, also with assaulting Mr. Frank Dyer” (“At Marylebone, Jane” 9). In the rendition of events provided by the article, Jane approached Dyer, inviting him to “walk along the ‘slips,’” but when he declined, she “swore at him and struck him on the mouth” (9). Such assaults seem expected, and it is intriguing that the possibility of the prostitutes’ aggression being a response *to* aggression is never in question: The prostitute is always perceived as the antagonist.

For example, another article bears the imposing first line, “At Marylebone, four strong looking women, named Anne Brown, Rebecca Smith, Elizabeth Francis, and Amelia Hughes, were charged with being disorderly prostitutes and annoying passengers in Regent’s-park” (9). This “gang” is an unwelcome aspect of the social milieu: “For some time past many complaints have been made at the station-house of assaults and outrages committed upon persons who happen to travel alone along the roads in Regent’s-park” (9). By referencing the history of complaints, the article positions this incident as part of Marylebone’s larger narrative of violence and disorder. In keeping with the women’s role in it, they are referred to as “the prisoners” throughout. The male victims, however, are often referred to as “gentlemen.” This article, for example, recounts that eyewitnesses “saw the prisoners surround a gentleman who called out for assistance. After struggling...he managed to break away from them. They then proceeded a little

further, when they surrounded another gentleman whom they met” (9). Regardless of the women’s guilt, the wording of the article paints a mental picture of a predatory gang seeking vulnerable prey, and these women are part of the reason “gentlemen” cannot traverse the park at night without fear.

The idea that many public parks were plagued—after dark, at least—with prostitutes and other degrees of degeneracy was common and fed into social anxieties about contagion. To prevent the spread of such infestation, then, citizens sometimes became involved in suppressing vice. When discussed openly in forums like *The Times*, these efforts also contributed to the narrative of their locales. For instance, Henry Dolby, an engraver from Regent Street, was one such motivated individual, according to the numerous articles that cite his part in prosecuting (or persecuting) prostitutes in his neighborhood of Marlborough Street, which intersected with Regent Street closer to the fashionable Westminster neighborhood.

Four articles from 1865 mention Dolby, who was affiliated with the West London Association for the Suppression of Immorality, as witness or accuser (“Marlborough-Street-Matilda” 11). His representation as an enforcer of morality and order undoubtedly prompted the commentary included in one of *The Times* articles:

The fact was that the nuisance had grown to such an extent that the inhabitants had been obliged at last to take the matter up...It was rather too hard that an inhabitant could not go out of his house without being annoyed, and that his wife and family should be offended at what they were compelled to witness. It was intolerable that the best street in London should be made the resort of such a class of persons as the prisoner. (11)

While a public commendation of Dolby's efforts, this praise also supports the impression of Marlborough Street as an area where prostitution is a persistent nuisance. The commentary that this is occurring in "the best street in London" speaks to Marlborough Street's ethos, which individuals like Dolby sought to preserve. However, not everyone praised his voluntary surveillance, and according to a March 14 notice, Dolby, "who has taken much pains to suppress the Regent-street nuisance, has in consequence been lately much insulted, and has received several threatening letters" ("Marlborough-Street-Mr. Dolby" 11). Another article recounts a prisoner's ensuing verbal threats when Dolby approached during her apprehension: "she would shoot Mr. Dolby or burn him in his bed; that he had got a plate-glass front to his shop.... she would break it herself or get some one to do it" ("Marlborough-Street-Eliza" 11). These accounts show Dolby as a man who believes in his cause so strongly that he braves violent threats; they also reinforce that prostitutes in Marlborough Street, no matter its affluence, are enough to constitute a cause.

In spite of threats against his person, Dolby's efforts continued until at least 1866, when he submitted a letter to *The Times* consisting of correspondence between himself, the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the First Commissioner of Her Majesty's Work, in which he requests that "the Government [exercise] its undoubted powers for suppressing the nuisance in question in the public parks" (Dolby 4). Dolby's request for government intervention stems from the climate created by the CDAs, and it shows his support of the extension of their regulatory powers. By publishing reports about prostitutes and documents campaigning to suppress "the nuisance in question,"

newspapers participated in conceiving ideas about material spaces, like Regent's Park, including how they were defined, who inhabited them, and what occurred within them.

The case of Aldershott exemplifies the significance of conceptions of space. Thirty-five miles away, Aldershott was “one of the most pleasant and picturesque hamlets in Hampshire” (Page 2). In 1854, the British government “established a military camp on a very extensive scale, the camps proper being divided by the Basingstoke Canal into two portions, the North and South Camps” (2). It was a busy hub that, at some point,



Figure 6. “Aldershott Map,” circa Nineteenth Century

processed “nearly all the troops in the British army” (“Soldier” 12). Thus, Aldershott played a vital role in building the Empire’s defenses. Interestingly, the same discourse that equated weak soldiers with a weak Empire, also presented the soldiers as vulnerable

to prostitutes: An army intended to defend the realm needed intervention to protect itself from disorderly women. Few detected the irony.

A conversation about public perceptions of Aldershott and prostitution was reflected in issues from April 1862. On April 7, *The Times* published an article based upon a report submitted by Captain Pilkington Jackson, R.A. to the Secretary of State for War in September 1861; Jackson's claims caused much consternation. By his calculations, "about two-thirds of those [soldiers] who are quartered there have on an average five hours of leisure in the day, making nearly 50,000 hours daily among them to be used for good or for evil" ("Soldier" 12). According to Jackson, the soldiers' choice between good and evil was complicated by "craftily-devised plans [that] are in operation first to attract, and then to excite and gratify the sensuous passions of the men. No system could be better planned for sapping gradually the health of the soldiers" (12). While Jackson's assertions were commonplace, in portraying Aldershott as a place where machinations are afoot to undermine the Empire, he offended the village's respectable inhabitants. He especially earned their ire by declaring, "When the men go out for a change of scene they have no resort but bad houses, and no company but prostitutes. The new village of Aldershott is inhabited principally by publicans, brothel-keepers, prostitutes, thieves, and receivers of stolen property" (12). This perception indelibly linked these images with the place-name "Aldershott," and, it was, quite simply, bad publicity.

Some residents used the article's publication as a springboard. A letter to the editor of *The Times*, from a "C.A." in Aldershott, referenced Jackson's claims and called

for additional government regulation. According to this letter, “[Of 3,473 members,] the admissions into hospital have amounted to 939 from all causes. There have been 334 admissions on account of venereal diseases...” (12). The writer uses these figures as grounds to request that “Boards of Health and other public bodies” take action against “vice and its resulting disease,” just as they would with other diseases, like cholera (12). Written in 1862, C.A.’s appeal to government action is representative of the reform efforts that resulted in the CDA legislation.

Other inhabitants of Aldershott took umbrage. An April 15, 1862 article details an “Indignation Meeting,” where three hundred of the village’s inhabitants gathered to address Jackson’s published claims, with emphasis upon *published*. Reported in third person, the Chairman attested,

Although he did not think it necessary or desirable to take notice of every paragraph which appeared in a newspaper, it must be remembered that the one in question formed portion of a report which had been laid before the House of Commons, whereby an amount of authenticity and importance was attached to it which it would not otherwise possess. (“Indignation” 11)

This response speaks to the public’s recognition of the press’ power: These “principal inhabitants” of Aldershott recognized that Jackson’s words created an image of their village that would be accepted by many as “reality.” And Jackson’s claims that Aldershott’s main inhabitants were thieves, prostitutes, and the like struck a nerve. A contemporary analysis would call this a situation of negative branding, with the citizens responding promptly to perform “damage control.”

As part of the conversation, the Chairman admitted that Jackson's report on the evils was not false, *per se*, but claimed that it was "unfair" for the village to be so evaluated by a stranger, who "knowing nothing of the neighbourhood or the progress which it was making, to point out the black spots only and omit all mention of the institutions, schools, churches, and chapels, and other bright and promising features which might easily be detected by any person who had his eyes open" ("Indignation" 11). This declaration elicited approval from the attendees, which the article translated into "(Cheers.)" (11). One of the meeting's resolutions was to deny "that the new village or town of Aldershott is principally inhabited by the class of persons described by Captain Jackson" and to acknowledge that Jackson's view was skewed "to the exclusion of all that was good" (11). The contents of this public meeting, conveyed through the platform of *The Times*, offered a competing image to that of Jackson's report: Aldershott's inhabitants were not all prostitutes and thieves.

The headline of an April 23, 1862 article, "The Morality of Aldershott," suggests that the citizens' efforts were successful. The Indignation Meeting had resulted in a deputation "to prepare an answer to the report of Captain Jackson" that met with Sir G.C. Lewis, Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for War ("Morality" 11). They disputed some of Jackson's facts and said they could not locate his sources, meticulously refuting Jackson's claims while offering testimony of Aldershott's charitable work and social endeavors. The result of these efforts, in the words of *The Times*, was Sir Lewis's "utmost attention," and he "appeared struck with the progress which had been made during the last few years. He promised that they should receive his best consideration,

and the deputation then withdrew” (11). Presumably, this was a conversation that would result in change. However, in 1866, a report published by *The Lancet* claimed that higher rates of venereal disease was producing increased degeneracy among recruits, “who now enlist, and frequently marry prostitutes” (“Aldershott” 4). The dateline of this report, published in *The Times*, read “Aldershott Camp.”

The Times possessed a unique influence upon the Victorian populace: Aimed at the economically secure middle class, its coverage of political matters on a global and local scale was largely considered trustworthy. The bias that often underlies journalism, even ethical, responsible endeavors in the field, thus becomes the lens through which readers receive and process the publication’s information. Victorian newspapers offered a cultural mapping, and their treatment of subjects like prostitution affected the “lay of the land,” so to speak. As my analysis shows, newspapers’ treatment of the prostitute rendered her a marker—a navigational point—that influenced readers’ judgments about space. This, in turn, affected the formation of individual knowledge and the production of cultural knowledge about the prostitute: who she was, where she belonged, and what she did in those places. This trend also manifests in articles from *The Daily News*.

The Daily News

The Daily News launched on January 21, 1846 under the editorship of Charles Dickens, whose “ambition was to fashion a liberal-radical paper that would rival in quality the great *Times*” (Roberts 61). The launch of *The Daily News* was carefully planned, down to the date of the first issue, which was chosen to coincide with the

opening of Parliament and final debates regarding the Corn Laws (Grubb 235). The inaugural edition featured an editorial by Dickens that laid out his grand design for the newspaper:

...the Principles advocated by *The Daily News* will be Principles of Progress and Improvement; of Education, Civil and Religious Liberty, and Equal Legislation; Principles, such as its conductors believe the advancing spirit of the time requires: the condition of the country demands: and Justice, Reason, and Experience legitimately sanction. Very much is to be done, and must be done, towards the bodily comfort, mental elevation, and general contentment of the English People. (Dickens, "Daily News" 4)

Dickens's aims set up *The Daily News* as a platform that would work for the good of the people; such liberal values placed the paper in opposition with more conservative publications like *The Times*. As the ethos of *The Daily News* developed, so did friction within its ranks. Within two weeks, Dickens resigned on February 9, 1846 because of interference from one of the newspaper's three owners (Roberts 51). John Forster assumed the editorship after Dickens's resignation. Over the following decades, *The Daily News* advocated for reform on multiple social, political, and economic platforms, including supporting the Stamp Act repeal, Irish Home Rule, and the North in the American Civil War (Kofron). However, despite its reform platform, *The Daily News* addressed an audience not unlike that of *The Times*, one that believed in reform yet also believed in the social class hierarchy. As David Roberts points out, "Earnest and elevated as were peasants and workers, they were still suspect, still in need of the guidance of the middle classes" (53). The political approach taken by *The Daily News* was, at best, uneven due to the constant changes in managers and editors during the newspaper's first

decade or so. These complexities aside, however, by the mid-1850s, *The Daily News* was *The Times*'s closest competitor, "selling over 5,000 copies," though the more established paper's sales dominated by a wide margin (Clarke, B. 230). The repeal of the Stamp Act boosted the paper's sales, and its circulation reached its zenith at 93,000 in 1896 (Brown 31).

Expectedly, there are differences between the coverage of contemporary social matters by *The Times* and *The Daily News*. For instance, *The Times* returned numerous results about Aldershott; in contrast, a search of *The Daily News* archives between 1862 and 1866 returned only five results. Two articles merely referenced soldiers being stationed at the camp as context, while one search return was an advertisement. Two results were what I consider "legitimate": a report of the Army Sanitary Committee, which discussed the situations of married *versus* bachelor soldiers stationed at Aldershott, and a letter to the editor, written by a veteran soldier concerned about the "disorderly passions" that plagued the "moral condition of Aldershott" (Veteran 6). These limited results contrast significantly with *The Times*'s fairly regular coverage of the well-known military camp and strongly support that *The Daily News*, however fractured its management may have been at times, sustained a different perspective on events than its main competitor.

The Daily News used a six-columned format like *The Times*. It employed section headers, such as "Law Intelligence" and "Central Criminal Court," to separate information, making *The Daily News* format more readable than many of its contemporaries. In these special sections, which were often divided by district, small

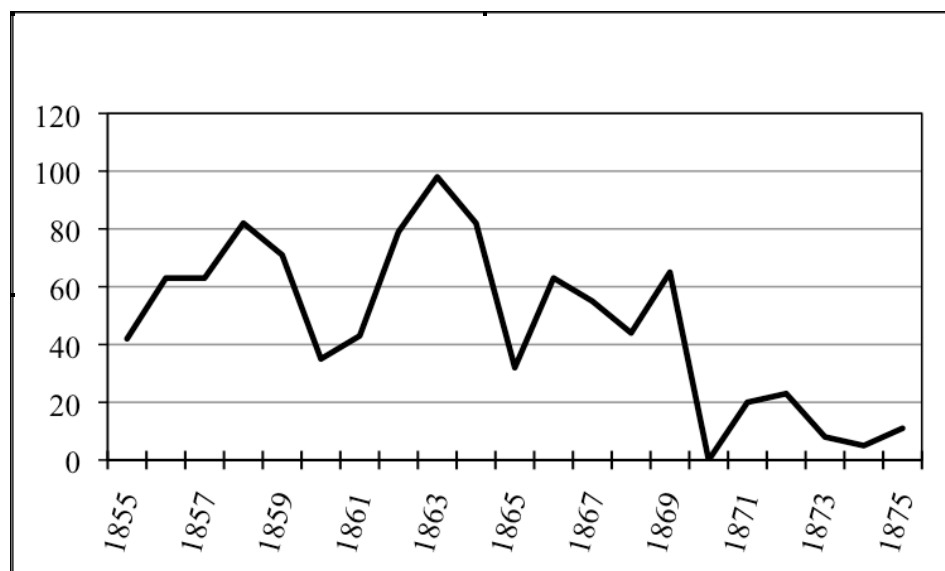
find one bail in 10% to keep the peace for six months.
MARYLEBONE.
Sarah Henderson, apparently about 30 years of age, and
 who is well known to the police by the cognomen of
 “Bloomer,” was charged with being drunk and disorderly.

Figure 7: “Marylebone” Article Headline (*The Daily News*)

headlines in all caps identify the locations of news events, suggesting a connection between the physical space and the article’s contents. The person’s name, italicized, then introduces the article. The juxtaposition of the all-caps place name with the italicized name attracts attention while directing a reader’s gaze.

As with my analysis of *The Times*, I wanted to assess *The Daily News*’s treatment of prostitutes and prostitution. To that effect, Table 6 graphs the results of my search for “prostitut*” in the newspaper’s online archives during a twenty-year span, from 1855 to

Table 6. Graphed Results for “prostitut*” (*The Daily News*)



1875. The graph has extreme peaks and depressions with the most significant peaks in 1863 and 1864, which yielded 79 and 82 results respectively. In 1863, there were five mentions in Arts and Sports, two in Business News, and 91 in News; in 1864, there were four mentions in Arts and Sports, two in Business News, and 76 in News. Only an examination of the articles on an individual basis can accurately establish how “prostitute” or “prostitutes” or “prostitution” were used. In spite of this, it is noteworthy that 1864, which witnessed the passing of the first CDA, returned the highest search results.

I executed targeted searches of *The Daily News* archives within the 1862 to 1866 frame, breaking down the searches by year (see Tables 7, 8, 9). Table 7 depicts the search returns for “prostitute”: News consistently generated the highest number of hits, with no

Table 7. “prostitute” results (*The Daily News*)

| | Editorial & Commentary | News | Business News | Arts and Sports | Advertising | Total |
|------|---------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| 1862 | - | 30 | - | - | - | 30 |
| 1863 | - | 42 | - | 1 | - | 43 |
| 1864 | - | 33 | 1 | - | - | 34 |
| 1865 | - | 11 | - | - | - | 11 |
| 1866 | - | 21 | 1 | 1 | - | 23 |

Table 8. “prostitutes” results (*The Daily News*)

| | Editorial & Commentary | News | Business News | Arts and Sports | Advertising | Total |
|------|------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| 1862 | - | 30 | 3 | 1 | - | 34 |
| 1863 | - | 37 | 2 | 3 | - | 42 |
| 1864 | - | 36 | - | 2 | - | 38 |
| 1865 | - | 14 | - | - | - | 14 |
| 1866 | - | 20 | - | 1 | - | 21 |

Table 9. “prostitution” results (*The Daily News*)

| | Editorial & Commentary | News | Business News | Arts and Sports | Advertising | Total |
|------|------------------------|------|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| 1862 | - | 14 | 2 | - | - | 16 |
| 1863 | - | 11 | - | 1 | - | 12 |
| 1864 | - | 13 | - | 1 | - | 14 |
| 1865 | - | 6 | - | - | - | - |
| 1866 | - | 12 | - | 2 | 8 | 22 |

more than one hit in any other category. Typically, results catalogued as Business News or Arts and Sports do not directly reference “prostitute.” Instead, the word is being used

as a verb or in another irrelevant capacity. Additional searches for “prostitutes” (Table 8) and “prostitution” (Table 9) also returned the greatest number of results in the News category. The archives of *The Daily News* reflects fewer content categories than *The Times* archives, yet overall search results for these terms are fewer as well, further emphasizing how the newspapers’ usage of them differs.

Several place names were returned that created patterns within the search results, including Clerkenwell, Marlborough-Street, Marylebone, and the Haymarket. For closer study, I chose “Marylebone” and “The Haymarket”; examination of the former generates a comparative analysis to its rendering in *The Times*. Once the place-names were chosen, I then executed searches targeted to these geographic locations during the selected time frame of 1862 to 1866. Table 10 depicts the data returned by those searches. The

Table 10. Marylebone and the Haymarket Comparison (*The Daily News*)

| | Marylebone (News) | Marylebone and prostitute or prostitutes (News) | Marylebone and prostitution (News) | Haymarket (news) | Haymarket and prostitute or prostitutes (News) | Haymarket and prostitution (News) |
|------|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1862 | 142 | 31 | 2 | 142 | 32 | 4 |
| 1863 | 116 | 43 | 1 | 124 | 38 | 1 |
| 1864 | 98 | 39 | 1 | 122 | 38 | 0 |
| 1865 | 50 | 15 | 0 | 59 | 15 | 0 |
| 1866 | 122 | 21 | 0 | 103 | 22 | 0 |

information suggests that, like *The Times*, *The Daily News* also connected the place names with the individual (prostitute) rather than the act (prostitution). However, unlike *The Times*, there is greater disparity between the number of results returned for locales and the number returned for the locale plus “prostitut*.” For example, when examining the 1862 Marylebone results in *The Daily News*, there were 108 News results that did not mention prostitute or prostitutes or prostitution. By comparison, the 1862 Marylebone results in *The Times* only reflected a difference of 42 results that did not mention any of the additional search terms. *The Daily News* search returned 51 more results for Marylebone (News) than *The Times*, indicating that the former simply paid more attention to the location. Comparing these results suggests that *The Times* reported less about Marylebone if prostitute(s) and prostitution were not involved. The disparity becomes greater when, upon sifting through the hits for “(prostitute or prostitutes or prostitution) and Marylebone,” I discovered that fewer than half of the search results were actually related to prostitution. Instead, because *The Daily News* is archived by page rather than by individual article, a returned “hit” may consist of separate and unrelated references to Marylebone and prostitute/prostitutes/prostitution. In addition, “prostitute” in verb form also generates occasional false returns. These disparities, while notable, do not impede my analysis.

The Daily News archival search reveals that the newspaper constructs a narrative connecting the individual (prostitute) to the physical location, rather than the act (prostitution). As readers internalize knowledge disseminated by the newspaper, the place-names become connected to the subject matter, so the selected articles proffer a

narrative that identifies the prostitute as belonging to and in the physical spaces of Marylebone and the Haymarket. Once again, the prostitute becomes a navigational marker that influences the reader's creation of knowledge about these locations, while the articles' rhetorical positioning identifies her as a vector of degeneration and disorder.

After reviewing *The Daily News* search results for Marylebone, I selected four articles for closer analysis of their rhetorical presentation of the prostitute. Three of the articles come from "The Police Courts" section of different issues. All three concern the apprehension of prostitutes, and while detailed, the articles' tones lack the lurid sensationalism common in much Victorian reporting. Instead, they serve as cautions against being "known." For example, an entry in "The Police Courts" section of the December 16, 1864 issue for Marylebone includes some extraneous details about its subject, Sarah Henderson: "who is well known to the police by the cognomen of 'Bloomer'" ("Marylebone. Sarah" 7). After being arrested for drunken disorderliness, and then tearing her clothing "all to pieces," she is dressed in workhouse clothes: "She now presented a most grotesque appearance, having on an old threadbare, washed-out cotton gown, which trailed a long way behind her, and a piece of calico over her head" (7). This detail, though, presents her as a sad, ridiculous character. The article lacks a sensational tone, and in fact, Henderson is presented as a prostitute who seeks punishment and reform. She confesses to being a "known" prostitute, and the article quotes her as saying, "I am sick and tired of going for only seven or fourteen days and a month. I want to go for trial, and then I shall come out a better woman. Do oblige me, sir" (7). The magistrate obliged her with a sentence of three months' hard labour: "She was removed

begging for six months, but her wish was not complied with” (7). By including Henderson’s pleas for a harsher sentence, the article has greater persuasive power than a simple court report: Here is a prostitute who wishes to be “known” as better than she currently is.

In a November 23, 1864 article, the events, as recounted, position the court discussion as a protection of the prostitute, albeit once certain details were resolved. When Mary Ann Paul, brought up on charges of drunkenness and disorderliness and annoying gentlemen, was arrested, a tall man in close proximity to her was also brought in. The majority of the article was devoted to recalling the magistrate’s conversation with the tall man, who was named Brown. After hearing of Brown’s unreliability and thievery from his own mouth and ascertaining that this man did not “manage” Paul, Yardley addressed her directly:

If I had been satisfied that you had been in company of a man of this bad character I would have sentenced you to as long a term of imprisonment as I could. I would do this because I consider that there is not a more dangerous class of person than prostitutes going about watched by men like this. Take warning, if I catch you plying your calling like this you may look out. (“Marylebone—Mary” 9)

Though Paul was a prostitute, she was not “known” and was not part of a man’s industry. This article suggests that once a prostitute became recognized incontrovertibly as such by society, there was no leniency for her.

The third article supports this thread, detailing the sordid story about a Harriet Allen, who had a long history with the court system and had lived in numerous places under several different aliases. Evidence showed that she was “known” as “a companion

of prostitutes, and was in the habit of frequenting the Victoria Railway station for the purpose of talking to gentlemen, and she had been seen going away with different men from the station” (“Harriet” 3). She was refused bail and committed for trial. In all three of these articles, the issue of identity—of how a person is “known”—is crucial.

The fourth, standalone article about Marylebone, “The Houseless Poor and the Workhouses,” concerns conditions and changes in response to the Houseless Poor Act. It offers a glimpse of Marylebone and its surrounding districts, during nightly inspections. The article recounted, “we have much satisfaction in stating that in no instance did we see the familiar nooks and corners occupied as they invariably were not many months ago. In St. James’s park there were some wretched creatures, half prostitute, half mendicant, dozing on the seats; but these on being roused refused to go to a workhouse even for the night” (2). This article, run on January 15, 1866, is also indirectly about the stigma of being “known.” The occupants of those “familiar nooks and corners” had become identified with those locations, an association that the Houseless Poor Act sought to remedy. The narrative of this piece suggests to readers that social reform seeks to remodel Marylebone and the surrounding areas, yet it also reinforces that those “wretched creatures, half prostitute, half mendicant” remain intractable occupants (2).

The area known as the Haymarket dates back to the Elizabethan era, when it was an area reserved for, quite obviously, the selling of hay. At times during the market’s evolution, it was portrayed as a habitat of questionable characters. By 1720, with inns and various entertainments, John Strype described the Haymarket as “a spacious street of great resort” (83). In his 1862 *Twice Round the Clock*, George Sala noted the

Haymarket's "unique" dual nature as a "broad thoroughfare" with its theatre and opera-house, shops, hotels, and restaurants—all of which took on a different affect at night (319-20). Sala remarks, "The change, at first imperceptible, is yet in a moment more immense...the whole Haymarket wakes, lights, rises up with a roar, a rattle, and a shriek



Figure 8. "Streetscape showing Haymarket Theatre, London," circa Nineteenth Century

quite pantomimic, if not supernatural" (320). This fierce and lively milieu was inhabited by colorful characters, both respectable and not, juxtaposed side-by-side. Bi-monthly "Midnight Meetings," for instance, occurred within the same scene that Sala describes, yet rather than encouraging the atmosphere of revelry and debauchery, their goal was to offer reform and religion to "fallen" women.

The five articles selected for closer analysis yield a discernible narrative pattern that connects space with identity. The May 31, 1862 article, "Immoralities of The Haymarket," recounts a meeting between representatives from the Haymarket district and the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey. Noblemen, clergymen, and tradesmen made up the

deputation, and they desired that “the interview should result in the diminution of the evils of which the deputation complained” (5). Their report, or memorial, concerned the Haymarket, and the surrounding thoroughfares of Marylebone and Islington. The article provides a partial record of the subsequent conversation.

An underlying warrant of the deputation’s claims was that “immoral” spaces attract immoral individuals and breed immorality, which will then spread the infection. The deputation specifically presented prostitution as a result of “brothels, gin palaces, oyster-rooms, refreshment-houses, low dancing and concert-rooms, and casinos,” where “crowds of women” sought men to accost (“Immoralities” 5). One member even complained of music bands in the streets, “remarking that these bands drew the prostitutes together” (5). While the image of strains of late-night music luring prostitutes together might elicit a modern-day chuckle, these concerns were very real in Victorian society.

The committee was not requesting social reform but was, instead, demanding government action. The committee members grounded their group’s ethos upon their own social stations (noblemen, clergymen, and tradesmen, in that order), and upon the strength of “all denominations of the community,” claiming, “It would have been easy to have procured the signatures of thousands of persons in the districts” (“Immoralities” 5). To ask for the extension of government involvement, the committee purposefully emphasized the presence of prostitutes in the community, appealing for the mitigation of what it called “a great shame to the nation” (5). Prostitutes were thus positioned as the

cause for prostitution and creators of “temptation” from which young men should be spared (5).

An interesting conflation occurs between the concepts of public “house” and domestic “house” since the presence of a license could transform what may have been a domestic house (in form if not in actual function) into a public house. In “The Immoralities of the Haymarket,” Sir Grey inquired as to whether or not “the evil was unrestrained in the streets or in the houses,” and several deputation members responded that it was “unrestrained” in both (5). Such disorderly “houses” are the focus of the remaining articles chosen for analysis. In 1862, Joshua Gray, “the keeper of a refreshment house,” located on Panton Street in the Haymarket, “was summoned for suffering prostitutes to meet together and remain in his house contrary to the provisions of the Police Act” (“Joshua” 6). Police proved “that about two o’clock on Friday morning there were several well-known prostitutes in the defendant’s house. They were well-dressed women, of the usual class who walk in the streets. There were in all 10 prostitutes who entered the house during the night” (6). The police’s emphasis was obviously upon pursuing Gray and the maintenance of his house alone because “when the police made their visit sufficient notice was given to all of the women being got rid of” (6). According to the recounted events, the social authorities were primarily concerned with spatial maintenance, suggesting (incorrectly) that ordering a disorderly space took precedence over ordering disorderly bodies. Gray was fined “40s” for his crimes (6).

Other cases also support this narrative about space and order: The person who owns space shall maintain its order, and if the person cannot do so, then penalties shall

ensue. In 1863, an assailant was charged with assaulting a confectioner and ice-shop keeper. Located on 221 Piccadilly, near the Haymarket, the shop was “where young prostitutes go in and out all the night” (“George” 6). While the assailant was initially ordered to pay a fine, when the Assistant Judge, Mr. Knox, discovered that the defendant had been charged with being drunk and disorderly outside the shop, the assailant was discharged and the defendant was fined “10s or seven days” (6). In 1865, Clement Agate was found guilty of keeping a disorderly house; the house was used “as wine and refreshment rooms” and “was frequented by the youngest and lowest prostitutes of the Haymarket and Coventry-street” (6). The defense claimed, “[Agate] had the misfortune to have a house in a bad neighbourhood, and if persons who went to his house made an improper use of it he ought not to be punished for that over which he had no control” (6). Sarah Williams offers yet another example. In 1864, she was charged with keeping a disorderly house at Oxendon Street, Haymarket. She pleaded guilty to charges that her house “was frequented by mere children, who took old men into the house, and the neighbours were annoyed at it” (6). The defense argued that such behavior had been occurring within this neighborhood for “more than twenty years,” but a Sergeant testified that not only were the prostitutes who frequented Williams’s house “very young,” but that “persons were admitted at a lower rate of charge than other houses in the [same] street, and it became necessary that attention should be called to this house in consequence of the complaints of the inhabitants” (6). The economic point made in the Sergeant’s testimony suggests that greater expense would yield slower traffic and/or

better clientele. This again illustrates the belief in space's ability to define those within it and to inform what they do.

* * *

Newspapers are products of their locations, generating news that reflects and defines their invoked communities. Thus, they are intricately connected to their social context. If genre operates as a dynamic form, one that is action *and* cultural artifact, then a rhetorical "excavation" of the Victorian newspaper genre uncovers how periodicals participated in discursive social practices. In order to "report" legitimately, newspapers establish ethos with their audience and conform to the conventions of their profession and to secure their audience's attention, they also use pathos, cultivating and/or ameliorating social anxieties, such as those about contagions that are illustrated by the prostitute. Nineteenth-century journalism reflects the efforts of publications like *The Times* and *The Daily News* to carve out a niche market, one that assured their authority as disseminators of public information and guaranteed their financial success as reliable, consumable commodities. By consciously crafting this niche, these newspapers invoked specific audiences. To meet the needs of those audiences, the newspapers had to consider tone, voice, subject matter, and bias. This attention can be discerned in how the subject of prostitution was approached.

As social instruments and authorities, *The Times* and *The Daily News* engaged with the dominant discourse to spatially construct the prostitute. Specifically, they used the prostitute as a navigational marker to direct readers' interpretations about physical places, thus wedding space and identity. This discursive exchange crucially links genre

(newspaper as artifact), identity (prostitute as contagion and subject of news stories), and professionalization (field of journalism). Analyzing this discourse network reveals how the prostitute's rhetorical construction influenced the formation of knowledge about the interactions between defined space and its inhabitants and functions. These discursive social practices transcend disciplines and genres, as chapter three's focus on medical rhetoric, specifically Acton's treatises about prostitution, illustrates.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM ACTON'S PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CONTAGIOUS PROSTITUTE

A grave internal malady lurks deep within the body social, and if society will not hear these words of mine, or words like them from others, the patient will be extinct before the disease is eradicated.

Acton, *Prostitution*, 1857 ed.

Cholera. Smallpox. Typhoid. Tuberculosis. Syphilis. Gonorrhea. Considering the ramifications of disease outbreaks, it is not surprising that anxieties about contagion “infected” Victorian Britain. Though medicine was rapidly evolving, lack of knowledge negatively impacted the treatment and control of disease. While some physicians were willing to broach unknown territory in the name of science and health even if the treatments, which often included experimental surgeries, were successful, the lack of standard hygiene protocols could be fatal. Dirty environments and disease often resulted in contagious illnesses and/or death, cementing the cultural association that the state of being “unclean” equated disease. Since social class often dictated the degree of home maintenance and self-care in which an individual could indulge (because of economy, access, and knowledge), disease—and the perception of disease—became classed. Members of lower classes were automatically assumed to be more susceptible to dirt and disease than members of higher classes.

Additionally, nineteenth-century rhetorics of morality associated a lack of cleanliness with the presence of immorality. This connection encouraged the reasoning

that if unclean equaled immorality and unclean equaled disease, then immorality equaled disease. This syllogism influenced the use of the prostitute, a limned figure existing outside of society, as scapegoat for society's afflictions. This chapter's epigraph metaphorically connects the social body of the British Empire to an individual, physical body as British physician William Acton argues that if the government does not take stringent action against prostitution, the "grave internal malady," then the British Empire will become "extinct" (ix; 1st ed). This argument renders imperial space, typically portrayed as a bastion of strength and stalwart nationhood, vulnerable to collapse because of its prostitute infestation. Interestingly, by establishing the prostitute as a point against which British society must resist, Acton's rhetoric imbues her with the power to topple an Empire. Contradictions like this permeate Victorian discourse about prostitution, impeding rhetorical attempts to control and contain the prostitute.

The developing nineteenth-century medico-scientific discourse engaged directly with contagion topoi in its production of prostitution discourse. This process led to a tenuously defined public health initiative, which Philippa Levine describes as "squarely aligned with a faith in scientific rationalism, claiming a dispassionate neutrality and insisting that germs knew barriers neither of class nor race" ("Public" 161). Public health's impartiality reinforced the threat presented by contagions, and its "emphasis on empirically knowable 'risk populations' lent medicine the vocabulary necessary to mask prejudice as science in the identification of those risk populations" (161). The prostitute constituted one such "risk population," and as a representative of contagion, both literal (venereal disease) and figurative (social degeneration), nineteenth-century medical

rhetoric often worked to articulate a method for her containment and control. Under the aegis of public health, a small number of social authorities addressed the multifaceted subject of prostitution, though even “sanitationists and public health professionals routinely avoided references to venereal disease...in their writings and speeches” (Levine, “Public” 160). These authorities instead used the prostitute to discuss venereal disease and related topics, portraying her as both symptom and disease. According to public discourse, in which medical rhetoric participated, the prostitute was a vector of disease, infecting and weakening the social and political body.

Though medical rhetoric engaged with Victorian discourse about prostitution in myriad ways, for the purposes of this chapter, I am particularly interested in how medical treatises employ representations of identity and space to make claims about prostitution. Using the lens of genre as action and cultural artifact, I investigate how the medical treatises’ spatial rhetorics contributed to knowledge formation about the prostitute—who she was, where she belonged, and what she did. I specifically examine how the prostitute, as a symbol of disease and dis-ease, functions as a navigational point that directs the internalization of knowledge about space and identity.

First, I address French hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet’s work on prostitution, the field’s touchstone, discussing his methods and claims to establish a point of reference. I then turn my attention to British gynecologist and venereologist William Acton and examine how his treatises construct the prostitute; I also analyze how genre interacts with rhetorics of professionalization to establish ethos (identity) and the

profession (space).²⁵ I explore these lines of inquiry further in the comparative reading of Acton's 1857 and 1870 editions of *Prostitution* that comprises the chapter's second half.

To nineteenth-century medical professionals like Parent-Duchâtelet, the subject of prostitution presented as a potential site of scientific inquiry, and they grappled with the prostitute topos as they would a literal infection, seeking to diagnose the root cause, establish its pathology, and prescribe a successful course of treatment. This medico-scientific approach diverged greatly from the historical studies of venereal disease, which even in the nineteenth century read largely as myth, superstition, and illogical supposition. Scientists like Parent-Duchâtelet approached the social problem pragmatically, gathering quantifiable data from which conclusions about prostitution, particularly its causes, effects, and the likelihood of its elimination, could be drawn. Some believed that such information would enable the control of prostitution and, consequently, disease.

As the scientific rhetoric of the medical field matured, so did the writing it produced. Parent-Duchâtelet, for example, includes statistics and references developing research methodologies in his treatises.²⁶ His treatises, and Acton's, share a similar form; both define their subject (one that was affecting society), investigate its causes, propose

²⁵ Two other prostitution treatises include Ryan's 1839 *Prostitution in London* and Sanger's 1869 *History of Prostitution*. While scholarship on the medical treatise as a form is severely limited, the general consensus is that medico-scientific writing grew from the pattern set by Parent-Duchâtelet. Ryan's work exhibits weaknesses common to earlier treatises, including exaggerated anecdotes that undermine his medical points. In the tradition of Parent-Duchâtelet and Acton, Sanger compiled a global history of prostitution with a special emphasis upon New York.

²⁶ Contemporary scholarship (see Tougaw and Nowell-Smith) pays close attention to the role of statistics in case narratives and histories. As a form that was based upon the Hippocratic tradition, case histories enabled an equation between organic life and inorganic quantifying, transforming "individuals' bodies into something statistically regular and understandable" (Nowell-Smith 48).

solutions, and feature unwieldy titles that outline the specifics of their contents in painful detail. These developments in scientific methodologies, particularly statistics and their “new, impersonal, and unimpeachable authority” contributed to the still-developing power of the medical profession and its members (Nowell-Smith 62). The compiled data and its publication reaffirmed the author’s professional ethos, while buoying the field’s assumed social authority. Medical rhetoric’s availability was increased by the expanding nineteenth-century publishing market as lowered printing costs and a growing literacy rate increased readerships, and advertisements like those found in *The Athenæum* and *The London Times* attracted readers.

Parent-Duchâtelet gave structure to the study of prostitution, and his treatise worked to make public and scientifically objective a subject considered reprehensible. A July 1873 *Foreign Quarterly Review* article about Parent-Duchâtelet’s work discusses the associated taint:

Those who investigate the evils and diseases of the social system, the moral and physical causes that deteriorate humanity in the mass, must be prepared to suffer similar reproach; the nature of their studies in itself sufficiently repulsive, while it brings them into contact with all that is shameful and loathsome in society, must expose them to the calumny of seeking such associations from choice... (“Art. III” 338)

While the threat posed to Parent-Duchâtelet’s reputation by his first-hand investigation of his topic was real, the article also noted that the respected French hygienist’s painstaking research and conscientious citizenship exempted him from such castigations.

Parent-Duchâtelet’s influence figures importantly in Acton’s work. Parent-Duchâtelet’s 1836 *De la Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris Considérée Sous le Rapport*

*de L'Hygiène Publique, de la Morale et de L'Administration; Ouvrage Appuyé de Documens Statistiques Puisés dans les Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Avec Cartes et Tableaux*²⁷ is recognized as the first significant medico-scientific offering to the public conversation about contagion anxieties and prostitution. The culmination of an eight-year research project, *De la prostitution* was undertaken to assist an anonymous gentleman who requested information about the prostitute population he hoped to reform. Parent-Duchâtelet undertook the project expecting to, in part, refine previous research, but instead found little that was useful. In his introduction, he writes candidly about the dearth of sources, acknowledging, “with the exception of some historical facts, of which I have availed myself, I found only errors and false notions” (18).²⁸ With the intent to supply this lack, Parent-Duchâtelet drew upon his already-proven successful methodologies for investigating urban pollution, which produced *Les Annales d'Hygiène Publique*, to ground his study of Parisian prostitutes. These methods included first-hand observation of the subject at hand, which he recalls in *De la prostitution*'s introduction:

while I was investigating the subject of the sewers and drains of Paris, the system appeared perfect so long as I studied it above ground: but on visiting them internally, and finding myself frequently up to my knees in garbage, I saw the defects of the plan which had hitherto been pursued, and stated the dangers to which the capital was exposed, and also the remedy. (21)

²⁷ I include the full title to emphasize how it parallels the full title of Acton's *Prostitution*; translated, Parent-Duchâtelet's title reads *Prostitution in Paris, Considered Morally, Politically, and Medically: Prepared for Philanthropists and Legislators, from Statistical Documents*. Henceforth, I use the abbreviated French title *De la prostitution* to refer to Parent-Duchâtelet's publication.

²⁸ Quotations in English from *De la prostitution* reference the 1845 edition of *Prostitution in Paris*, translated from the French by an anonymous American physician, and published by Charles H. Brainard of Boston, Massachusetts.

His investigation of the Parisian sewer system met with such success that he applied the same heuristic to his study of prostitution: He observed and catalogued prostitutes, visited their homes (legal and otherwise), visited the refuges, researched the process of inscription—in short, he compiled a compendium of information about Parisian prostitutes and their haunts. In the end, Parent-Duchâtelet declared prostitution “as inevitable as the sewers, garbage dumps, and rubbish heaps,” a simile that reinforces commonplace ideas connecting urban pollution and prostitution (338).

The treatise consists of nineteen chapters that survey practices of prostitution, prostitutes’ physical characteristics, prostitutes as a social body, locales of prostitution, and regulatory practices. Parent-Duchâtelet covered a breadth of topics, examining and recounting statistical minutia such as the hair color, eyebrow color, and eye color of a target group of prostitutes. Incidentally, in a group of 12,600 “girls at Paris,” chestnut was the predominant hair color, with 6,730 results, and red, with 48, was the least common (85). He also investigated the prostitute’s moral and mental make-up, asserting, “It is difficult to conceive of the lightness and fickleness of the mind of the prostitute; it is extremely hard for them to pursue a train of reasoning; the slightest thing disturbs them” (6). Parent-Duchâtelet suggested that this lack of mental stability “accounted for,” in at least a small way, “their want of forethought, and their indifference to the morrow and their future fate” (6). While the French hygienist likely intended his conclusions to be charitable and to encourage the charity of the respectable populace, his reasoning further diminished the prostitute’s agency.

Though Parent-Duchâtelet limited his study to the prostitutes of Paris, he recognized the “continual interchange” among prostitutes throughout the city and its surrounding areas (208). His conclusion intones, “Prostitution is an evil existing in every country and at all periods. Perhaps it is impossible to destroy it; but still it is important to strive to diminish its frequency and dangers” (227). He also acknowledges prostitution’s multi-faceted appeal as a subject of inquiry: “The moralist attempts to reform vice, the legislator to prevent crimes, physicians to arrest diseases...” (227). Parent-Duchâtelet desired to “ascertain the cause of [prostitutes’] depravity, and discover, if possible, the means of diminishing it” (227). He fulfilled his purpose, producing an ontology of prostitution and advocating for the continuation of inscription and registration to control the ineradicable population.

By all accounts, *De la prostitution* was a success. An anonymous American doctor reviewed it as “the most-philosophical examination ever published of this revolting vice, and has done much to lessen the evil which takes deep root amid large assemblages of men” (qtd. in Parent-Duchâtelet 1). *The London Lancet* endorsed the “unique and very remarkable work” and its author, who “has sifted the causes of prostitution, and has endeavored to show what is the right policy to be adopted toward its wretched victims, with a view to the preservation of their health, and the lessening of the amount of evil which they inflict on the whole community” (“Analytic” 16). Some of Parent-Duchâtelet’s ideas have not withstood the test of time, such as his now-infamous argument, “the individual has a right which prostitutes can not claim” (Parent-Duchâtelet 207). Yet his contributions to medico-scientific rhetorics endure. As Charles Bernheimer

argues in his 1997 *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, Parent-Duchâtelet's investigations "involved a civilly responsible effort to channel and control his civilly subversive fascination with the rotten, corrupt, and disintegrating. It is this tension, conveyed in a style of nearly classical restraint and impersonal distance, that lifts [his] work above that of other hygienists of his day" (10). Parent-Duchâtelet's close attention to his subject matter, whether it was a sewer or a prostitute, set a baseline for future statistical studies of public health.

Though Parent-Duchâtelet died unexpectedly before *De la prostitution* was published, his legacy influenced medical writing and the profession at large for decades. His influence, among others, manifests in William Acton's work. Trained in Paris, Acton benefited from France's cultural cache as a centre of medical learning: "Students from North America and Europe flocked to Paris and returned home beating the drum for French medicine, armed with skills in pathology, chemistry and microscopy—and a stethoscope in their valise" (Porter, *Blood* 79). Acton specialized in gynecology and venereology after training under Philippe Ricord, a venereologist who, in 1838, established that gonorrhea and syphilis were not the same disease. Acton's research on spermatorrhea panic and masturbation hysteria culminated in the 1857 *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Youth, in Adult Age and in Advanced Life*. Though the title is gender-neutral in focus, the treatise—except for two references—addressed males. Despite this disparity, or perhaps because of it, considering the dominant cultural attitude towards the female body, the treatise was popular and went through six editions, the last in 1875. *Prostitution* was also published in 1857, though to

less fervent acclaim. The National Association of Social Science endorsed it, as did Lord Brougham, former Lord Chancellor, who declared the treatise, “A most important paper on that great source of immorality of young women in London and elsewhere which Mr. Acton has so justly and without the slightest exaggeration described” (“Lancet”). Acton revised *Prostitution* and published a second edition in 1870. This advantageous marketing strategy capitalized on Victorian society’s interest in contagious disease regulation and legislation.

Regardless of his medical acumen or his theories’ longevity, Acton shrewdly positioned himself as a vanguard in his field. He published frequently and often to popular acclaim, establishing authority by invoking his Parisian training and professional contacts, like Ricord, and advocating for new treatments and new implements. Like today’s “publish or perish” academic environment, such efforts were necessary for continuing professional success. As Ivan Crozier explains,

There are two points necessary to understand Acton: firstly, if one did not have privileged access to elite networks, one had to specialise if one was to survive in the medical world of London in the mid-nineteenth-century; secondly, one could utilise the advances in French medicine which were catching on in the tradition-steeped British medical world to one’s advantage by publishing setting oneself up as an expert. Acton did both of these things. (6)

By cultivating his professional ethos, Acton contributed to the medical treatise genre and helped mitigate negative connotations attributed to his specialties because they focused upon the (female) body, sexuality, and disease. As Ellen Rosenman explains, “[Treating] venereal disorders stigmatized surgeons and tainted their work with specifically sexual connotations as well” (30). A gynecologist and venereologist, Acton’s decision to study

sexually active females who often suffered from and disseminated venereal diseases seems logical, but as with Parent-Duchâtelet's study, the prostitute was a doubly inscribed threat: Not only was she female, but she was also a diseased female. By actively creating and sustaining his professional ethos, Acton helped insulate his work from impugnation. His efforts were successful—during his lifetime, at least. In 1875, *The Medical Times and Gazette* remembered him as “a surgeon of eminence and celebrity” (“Obituary” 697). Two years later, Sheldon Amos referred to him as the “late, lamented Mr. Acton” in the preface to *A Comparative Survey of Laws in Force for the Prohibition, Regulation, and Licensing of Vice in England and Other Countries* (v).

Today, Acton's reputation is, at best, problematic, though some pre-1980 scholarship retains a certain degree of reverence for the Victorian physician. *Prostitution's* 1870 second edition was reprinted in 1971, and in a biographical note to the text, editor Anne Humphries described Acton's ideas as too aggressive to be properly appreciated during his own time: “Though Acton's work was favourably received by the press when it appeared, such home truths were perhaps too strong for the book to be acceptable to the general Victorian reader” (vi). Humphries believed that Acton's “honest observation...[ensured] the book's continuing interest for the modern reader” (vi). Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians* (1975) offers one of the last honorific “readings” of Acton, describing him as “a truly representative Victorian: earnest, morally austere yet liberally inclined, sincere, open-minded, possessed by the belief that it was his duty to work toward the alleviation of the endless human misery and suffering which sometimes

seem to be the chief constituents of society” (2). Humphries and Marcus were among the last to read Acton and his treatises on prostitution generously.

Predominantly, scholarship post-1980 criticizes Acton’s theories, particularly those that now seem quack-like, such as his theories about spermatorrhea. His perpetuation of Victorian misogyny, and his work’s frequent and often-unattributed integration of other published texts have also attracted negative critical attention. In 1980, Judith Walkowitz described “Acton’s social observations [as] largely derivative,” and argued, “Rather than a new intellectual venture, *Prostitution* represented the ultimate elaboration of a style, a ‘literary genre,’ whose basic assumptions inhibited any further development” (46). Jeanne Peterson’s “Dr. Acton’s Enemy” (1986) contests, “A careful scrutiny of Acton’s medical work uncovers patterns of writing and thinking that reveal his deviant character as a writer and professional man” (585). In 1992, Stanley Renner offered a less-virulent response to Acton and his work, noting that *Prostitution* was “remarkable for its common sense though not without touches of the blindness and moralizing of the period,” and identifying Acton “as one of the notable pioneers of a common-sense approach to [the management of sexuality]” (22). Mary Spongberg criticizes Acton in *Feminizing Venereal Disease* (1997), arguing, “Far from being a novel approach to prostitution and venereal disease, Acton’s work is rather like a museum devoted to all the mythologies of prostitution fostered during the nineteenth century” (46). This pattern of escalating critical and negative response speaks to the very real limitations of Acton’s theoretical work.

Despite such limitations, I suggest that reading *Prostitution* as an artifact of Victorian discourse about prostitution exposes the network of discursive social practices in which it was produced. Such a reading reveals how *Prostitution* rhetorically constructed the prostitute, using her as a navigational point to make claims about the prostitute's identity and the spaces she inhabited. In making his claims, Acton uses his text to assert the authority of his profession, thereby cultivating its ethos and, supposedly, ensuring that his claims receive due attention. It does behoove scholars to remember Peterson's caution "that historians should be aware of the motives, the status, and even the qualifications of those medical sources we cite" ("Dr. Acton's" 586). Therefore, Acton's *Prostitution* should be read skeptically, in part because of the chasm that exists between nineteenth-century theories and twenty-first century facts about the subject but also to guard against his arguments being interpreted as exempla for Victorian medical opinions at large. After all, "Mere medical qualification does not license a man to speak for the medical profession" (586). For these reasons, I focus on what the editions of *Prostitution* represent as rhetorical evidence. Considering Acton's treatises as product (artifact) and process (social action) enables their excavation as testaments to the ways that genre, space, and identity interact with contagion anxieties as illustrated by the prostitute. A comparative close reading of the 1857 and 1870 editions of *Prostitution* exposes these interactions, revealing their engagement with rhetorics of professionalization, along with the spatial rhetorics at play and their effect upon constructions of identity. To accomplish these ends, the following section compares the editions' rhetorical positioning and performs a close reading of the 1857 and 1870

prefaces. The chapter's last section examines the spatial rhetorics that categorize the prostitute's identity, her location, and her functions.

Prostitution as Product and Process

I have often regretted that persons more learned and influential than myself have not publicly attempted to enforce upon the State the propriety, firstly, of arresting to some extent the unnecessary speed at which Prostitution is now eating into the heart of society; and secondly, of recognising and opposing Venereal Diseases upon public grounds.

Acton, *Prostitution*, 1857 edition

Twelve years have elapsed since I submitted to public consideration the first edition of this work... Then, the attempt to rouse attention to a question that seemed to myself one of national importance, seemed almost hopeless. Now, the mind and conscience of the nation are awakened, and opinions which would have been formerly dismissed as idle dreams, are deemed worthy of serious attention.

Acton, *Prostitution*, 1870 edition

As textual artifacts, the 1857 and 1870 editions of Acton's *Prostitution* provide insight into the evolving political discussions about prostitution in Britain. Acton intended for the 1857 first edition to open a public discussion of prostitution, to "rouse attention to a question that seemed to [him] one of national importance" (v; 1st ed). Acton depicted London as harboring an infestation of prostitutes that threatened the health and stability of the British Empire at large. The frontispiece's quotation, from *The Phases of London Life* by E.L. Blanchard, claims, "Had the poets to fable a new mythology, the Eros of the London streets would be not the offspring of Venus, but the child of SORROW and SALVATION" (emphasis original). By appealing to readers' sensibilities about the condition of their worlds, Acton positioned his treatise to first elicit anxiety

about these threats and then to assuage. However, the first edition instead exhibits the weaknesses and uncertainties of the early stages of public dialogue about prostitution more than it offers workable solutions.

The thirteen years between the two editions witnessed a growing public interest in prostitution and a refinement in related political conversation. The series of contagious disease legislation (1864, 1866, 1869) sparked myriad public responses both in favor of and opposed. The politically charged atmosphere even generated organizations and publications, such as the Ladies' Association against the Contagious Diseases Act and *The Shield*. Now that "the mind and conscience of the nation [were] awakened," Acton revised his 1857 treatise to reflect the reform movement's impact and published the second edition in 1870 (v; 2nd ed).

Despite the noteworthy time lapse and political shifts, some continuity does exist between the two editions. Acton's rhetoric consistently enacts conflict, appealing to his readers to view the prostitute figure as a member of society while reminding them that her depraved sense of self, which is tied to her morality, renders her a social cipher. Such contradiction generates anxiety. Fanning these flames of anxiety benefited Acton, since being a specialist in venereal disease gave him a platform to perform as physician, protector of the public, and potential queller of anxieties about contagion. For instance, in the 1870 edition, Acton frames his investigation into prostitution to seemingly reassure his readership:

I will only ask the reader to bear in mind that the object of our inquiry is no less how we may elevate the prostitute, than how we may protect the public, for we may lay it down as a golden rule that to benefit society at the expense of the

prostitute is as unrighteous and injurious as it is to benefit the prostitute at the expense of society. (99; 2nd ed)

His rhetoric essentially calls upon the ranks of British society whom his treatise addresses to recognize the infiltrative prostitute and to do something about her. Along with others, including Parent-Duchâtelet, Acton did not believe that prostitution could be truly eradicated, though he did believe that the contamination of the British Empire could be controlled. As a result, his work often invokes an appeal to patriotism and national pride. In his prostitution treatises, Acton rhetorically constructs the British Empire as a bastion of strength that should vanquish the evil lurking within—which, in this case, is prostitution. At the same time, he contrarily positions the Empire as vulnerable to the threat of prostitution.

Acton emphasizes the transitory nature of prostitution in both editions as well. Though this belief rationalized the need for reform movements, the suggestion of a “transitory” prostitute intensified anxieties about urban and domestic spaces. If a prostitute might very well “become the wife of an Englishman and the mother of his offspring” if she were not a mother already, then the sanctity of the home (or, rather, the sanctity of the middle or upper class home) could become compromised (246; 2nd ed). Such assimilation or successful social masking, depending upon interpretation, heightened urban paranoia—after all, how could the morally and physically contagious prostitute be eradicated if that same figure was ensconced in hearth and home? Representing the prostitute as threatening *and* familiar challenged classifications of

morality, cleanliness, and disease, and rhetorical conflicts like this complicated Acton's overall argument.

The editions are dissimilar in significant ways. The full title of the 1857 edition reads *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, & Sanitary Aspects, in London and other Large cities with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils*. The key phrase here is "Mitigation and Prevention," which foreshadows the angle of the 1857 treatise: to alleviate and prevent. Notable among these ideas is a scheme to encourage colonization: "so let England, acting as a nation, wisely direct a flood of population upon the ample fields of her American colonies, where the useless must become useful, the worthless almost worthy, and where the emigrant who can work has but two alternatives—death or prosperity" (185; 1st ed). Acton proposed that emigration of the useless and worthless would aid in stabilizing England's population and improving marriages and morality. His ill-conceived plan does not consider that "mitigating" prostitution by sending part of the population overseas does not, in fact, *solve* the social problem at hand. Instead, Acton employs the platform of mitigation to advocate for a situation that would enable the British, Londoners especially, to indulge in "out of sight, out of mind." The emigration scheme exemplifies the naïveté that occasionally plagues the 1857 edition.

The 1870 edition's title prefigures Acton's maturation in argumentative style: *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of its Attendant Evils*. "Control and Prevention" underscores Acton's new arguments about

prostitution. In the 1870 preface, he acknowledges that the changed political climate has led to his revisions: “The fresh phase assumed by the [prostitution] question discussed in the ensuing pages has necessitated considerable changes and modifications on my part, and I find that much of the matter contained in my first edition may now be conveniently omitted. The whole work has been carefully revised and remodeled, and to a great extent re-written” (vii; 2nd ed). His proposal for Canadian emigration was among the parts omitted, and overall, the second edition more aggressively lobbies for increased government intervention and diminishes the prostitute as individual, citing that she forfeits individual liberty by engaging in actions that threaten British society.

Within the past twenty years, both editions of *Prostitution* have come under scrutiny as a result of questions surrounding Acton’s claim of authorship because he borrows heavily, and sometimes without acknowledgement, from outside sources. During Acton’s lifetime, copyright regulations were nascent, if that, and issues of authorship and overlooked attribution were common issues in medical writing. Acton acknowledged that for the 1870 edition, “I have been enabled to make use of the researches of others, and much official assistance has been accorded to me (vii; 2nd ed). In his introduction to the 1968 reprinting of an abridged version of Acton’s second edition, Peter Fryer ranks the text as “much superior to any other nineteenth-century account of prostitution in this country” (17). He directly addresses the plagiarism common among writers about prostitution, arguing, “True, Acton himself is not above lifting an occasional fact or figure from [Michael] Ryan, without acknowledgement; but the bulk of *Prostitution* is based on original study and observation. This makes Acton a great deal more accurate

than Ryan and those who substantially rely on him” (18). However, recent scholars, including Peterson and Walkowitz, have argued that Acton’s work is more an amalgamation of texts he chose and assembled rather than original research. Any reader of *Prostitution* recognizes that Acton uses outside information because he either conversationally references the source, provides formal attribution, or the writing style and voice discernibly shifts. For example, Acton includes a first-person report by Inspector-General Dartnell that was originally published in the April 28, 1860 *British Medical Journal* (194; 2nd ed.). Though Acton may have preserved the report’s first-person perspective to assure the integrity of his source information, there are multiple insertions like Dartnells, and the shifts between perspectives can be confusing, as can the numerous pages of borrowed reports and accounts. While it is important to note the authorship controversy because it impacts interpretations of Acton’s ethos, my focus remains upon Acton’s treatises as cultural and rhetorical artifacts that produce and reflect Victorian discourse about prostitution.

Acton consciously cultivated a professional and authoritative ethos by situating his work within a specialized field and crafting his ethos rhetorically. These moves were necessary to establish social authority and to achieve the social power needed to manipulate space. He begins the 1857 preface by positioning himself as humble in terms of gathered knowledge and power *and* as castigator in terms of failed social protection: “I have often regretted that persons more learned and influential than myself have not publicly attempted to enforce upon the State the propriety...of arresting...Prostitution...” (v; 1st ed). He emphasizes that the anonymous authorities who have not taken action

have, as a result, shortchanged the British populace at large: "...unfortunately, the best of minds and the most excellent of pens have hitherto refrained from the various topics involved, because (confounding delicacy with difficulty) they have conceived a superstition that they would find opposed to them an array of obstacles, all attempts to pass which would be futile, if not wrong" (v; 1st ed). In this statement, Acton distinguishes himself as rational, rather than superstitious, and unafraid of defying social norms. He instigates resistance against prostitution to act for the social good.

To negotiate the tensile and controversial subject of prostitution, Acton carefully defined his initial audience as "serious laymen," including parents, but not "the professional reader, to whom the deeper shadows of the great world offer no novelty" (vi; 1st ed). His intended audience is male, as evidenced by the use of male pronouns throughout the treatise. This gendering, a consequence of a patriarchal writing tradition, adheres to the belief that "good" women would not be inclined to read or discuss such salacious subject matter. We see this gender bias in his discussion of the father who, if the "educational and sanitary measures" that Acton's treatise proposes were adopted, "with what diminished anxiety would *he* not contemplate the progress of *his* boys from infancy to manhood" (emphasis added, vi; 1st ed). Furthermore, he decries the suggestion that his publication might tarnish innocents and removes his own liability. As "these pages will not be vended or purchased at street corners...I have only, therefore, to remind alarmists, that not on the author, but on the purchaser, must rest the responsibility of their falling into young hands without proper interpretation and commentary" (viii; 1st ed). With these words, Acton transfers the responsibility from himself to his audience.

Throughout the 1857 preface, Acton's rhetoric exhibits an awareness of the risk of discussing prostitution. Recognizing the scandal that might ensue, he acknowledges that some may expect him to be apologetic for his self-perceived bluntness about prostitution. He opportunistically constructs his ethos as social advocate and claims that "the nature of the subject has forced [my plain speaking] upon me" (viii; 1st ed). He also states, "To have called things here treated of by other than their right names would have been in any writer an absurdity—in me a gross one" (viii; 1st ed). He undercuts any confession of impolite bluntness, however, by performing a classic apologia, regretting that his style is "somewhat rugged" and acknowledging that the information he uses may "to optimists or recluses appear exaggerated" (viii; 1st ed). These remarks were followed with a rather clichéd rejoinder that re-establishes his authority on the subject: "The visions I have indulged in may be hard to grasp. But this most complicated knot demands a swordsman, not an infant" (viii; 1st ed). With this move, Acton implies that his non-receptive audience is naïve and juvenile and attributes skill and dexterity to himself—the "swordsman."

To support the controversial claim that prostitution was a state of transition for most females, Acton had to rhetorically establish his authority. He argued that the prostitute "generally, in course of time, amalgamates with the population" (vi; 1st ed). We should note his use of qualifiers in proposing this theory, as they suggest an awareness of the controversy his argument would elicit and betray tentativeness. On this point, he again appeals to his audience through community values, proclaiming, "society could not be uninterested in [the prostitute] during her state of transition" (vi; 1st ed). He also

employs rhetorics of morality that were part of the dominant social discourse in his address to community and cites “the perilous self-sufficiency of the Pharisee, and the willful blindness of the Levite, who ‘passed by on the other side.’” By appealing to his audience’s morality, Acton positions the prostitute as socially inferior to the rest of society: She is in need of help from her moral superiors. Acton establishes himself as one such moral superior and lends support to his view that prostitution was a transitory state and the transition would be shorter with proper social intervention.

The 1857 preface embodies the unstable and inchoate state of prostitution reform. Acton’s attempts to construct a rhetorical scaffold for his ensuing argument are ineffective, and the preface’s weaknesses and contradictions indicate problems of the treatise as a whole. For instance, Acton employs rhetorics of morality and calls upon the Church and State, which he describes as “the proper parents, guardians and teachers of the wicked as of the virtuous” (vii; 1st ed), yet he also disparages the weaknesses of these organizations, among others:

Prayer and lamentation will not cure [prostitution and its resultant evils]—sackcloth and ashes will not arrest the deterioration of our national fibre. The schemes of Reformatories, Maids’ Protection Societies, Vice and Obscene Book Suppression Societies... [are] but paltry, peddling scratches on the surface of evil. They will ever be miserably partial in their effects, if not utterly abortive. (viii-ix; 1st ed)

This passage contradicts ideas voiced mere pages earlier, where Acton encourages reformatories and hospitals, discourages “severity and suppression,” and professes that his sketches of foreign disciplinary regulation of prostitutes are intended “to give some notion of [the systems’] limited extent of vice” (vi; 1st ed). While these inconsistencies

might be due, in some degree, to “textual amalgamation,” it is more likely that the at-times confused treatise simply reflects the at-times confused public discourse about prostitution and the inability of medico-scientific rhetoric to adequately address the subject. In the late 1850s, the “field” of medicine was relatively new, and its writing was not entirely “scientific.” Authors like Acton were still wrestling with how to write persuasively about subjects despite using fallible research methods.

Over a decade later, active social reform movements exacerbated by the CDAs, the increase of statistical data, and the cachet more readily afforded to the medical profession profoundly influenced Acton’s revision. In the preface to the 1870 edition, Acton overtly called attention to the forward thinking his first edition exhibited and gave himself credit for instigating the movement to extend regulatory practices of prostitutes and, thereby, aiding society’s advancement:

I believe I may claim, without vanity, to have in some measure paved the way for, and guided the progress of this change, and I hail with satisfaction the advent of the time which has at length arrived when we may contemplate work accomplished, and, guided by the experience gained from results attained, consider what more remains to be achieved. (vi; 2nd ed)

His self-congratulation re-asserts his assumed role as authority on the subject of prostitution and establishes his role as a social visionary—one who sees so far ahead that society has only “at length arrived.” While such bloated remarks likely repel current readers, for a reading populace not yet fully acquainted with the rhetorics of professionalization, which often relied upon establishing distance from the subject and

suggesting the speaker's omniscience to persuade, Acton's comments and style would not have been unusual.

The changed climate meant less pressure to justify the publication of a treatise about prostitution or to define an intended audience, so Acton devotes significantly less attention to those endeavors. He recycles the majority of the original paragraph that claims anxiety would diminish "were the sanitary measures I advocate once in operation" (xii; 2nd ed). He also reuses the declarative first sentence: "The reader who is a conscientious parent must perforce support me" (viii; 1st ed and xii; 2nd ed). And he calls upon the armies, navies, and others who have a prescribed interest in protecting the health and productivity of the population from the evils of prostitution and venereal disease. The public and active conversation about prostitution ensured that Acton's second edition was targeting a niche market, and he calls out these consumers to remind them that their actions can protect the Empire and her constituents because prostitution is a product of moral and political laxity. The 1870 preface mirrors anxieties about contagion's entrenchment in cultural discourse during the Victorian Period's apex. Acton states, "I desire to protect both society at large, and the individual, from the permanent injury at present inflicted by a highly contagious and virulent disorder. I desire also to heal the sick prostitute, and to cleanse her moral nature" (xi; 2nd ed). In order to accomplish these aims, Acton and his readers, whom he directly addresses, must be conscientious, morally vigilant, prudent in political judgment, and motivated to action.

By 1870, Acton's former stance against "severity and suppression" and his use of foreign regulatory systems to illustrate their limited control and "the spur given to

immorality in private by its suppression in public” had given way to more aggressive, yet still convoluted, approaches (vi-vii; 1st ed). While he yielded “to no man in my love of liberty and regard for religion” (vii; 2nd ed), he also took care “to show that the interference which I propose with personal liberty is unhappily necessary both for the sake of the community at large, and of the women themselves” (vii; 2nd ed). This assertion echoed the common opinion that individual liberty was a right denied to prostitutes; because of the public danger they knowingly posed, their liberties were forfeit. Acton argues that his proposed interference is not unusual, that “it is the extension to venereal disorders of the principle on which the Government endeavors to act in dealing with other forms of preventable disease” (vii; 2nd ed). He neatly couches his proposal to interfere with the personal liberty of identified and suspected prostitutes within sympathetic language that expresses a respect for individuals, assuring readers that their liberties—because his readers *are* individuals—are not threatened (216; 2nd ed). For many Victorian readers, the implication that prostitutes were not individuals was not a shocking claim.

Acton saw prostitution as a system that produced myriad evils, and he approached it as such (75; 2nd ed). He argued for standard regulatory practices on the part of law enforcement, decrying the sense of “exerting [their] authority in those cases only which, by open contempt for order and decency, obtrude into notice and demand repression” (77; 2nd ed). He reasoned that it was not fair to place the onus of “restraining... contagious maladies” upon “the improvident and profligate” (83; 2nd ed.). Acton believed that regulation of the prostitute was essential because she was incapable, or unwilling, to

monitor herself. As he said, “A woman who knows herself to be diseased, is free to invite all comers to the enjoyment of her person, and to spread among them deadly contagion” (83; 2nd ed). To make his point, the 1870 edition of *Prostitution* surveyed then-current regulations in Britain, the intricacies of foreign systems, and regulations for military and civil life. His study grounded his argument that the CDAs extend to the metropolis in order to inhibit prostitutes’ ability to “baffle the vigilance of the police, to defy the law, and spread disease, by living in the adjoining districts, thus adding greatly to the immorality of these places” (215; 2nd ed). Only a regulatory system more pervasive and powerful than the system of prostitution could defeat it.

Once again, though, Acton’s rhetoric enacts conflict as he argues that regulatory practices are required to deal with prostitution, yet then moves on to argue for amelioration. If social measures could not prevent a woman becoming a prostitute, then “amelioration” should be undertaken. This step would, Acton believed, “enable her to pass through this stage of her existence with as little permanent injury to herself and as little mischief to society as possible” (xi; 2nd ed). The persisting view of prostitution as a transitory state remained controversial because it suggested that, once masked, the “infected” could safely inhabit the domestic sphere. In the second edition preface, Acton posits, “in proportion as [the prostitutes] are assisted or neglected during their evil days will they assume the characters of wives and mothers with a greater or less degree of unsoundness in their bodies and pollution in their minds” (xi; 2nd ed). Today’s readers react strongly to the fallacious nature of this claim, of course, because it simply does not make sense. As an argumentative strategy, however, it opens a door for Acton’s argument

that the CDAs extend to the metropole, a primary “hook” in the 1870 edition. Acton argues, “by means of [the CDA] machinery alone can we discover and detain till cured the women afflicted with syphilitic diseases” (xi; 2nd ed). The resources required for the Sisyphean task of locating, examining, and containing known prostitutes hindered the success of Acton’s proposal, as did the uneasiness some felt at categorizing prostitutes as non-individuals to justify denying their individual liberty. However, the venerated doctor believed that such financial and ethical discomfort was a necessary evil: “In our efforts to ameliorate the prostitute, we must doubtless tolerate much that we would willingly discountenance, but of two evils we must choose the least” (xii; 2nd ed). For Acton, anything that could halt prostitution’s infiltration of British society, even if that “anything” were iniquitous itself, was justified.

Juxtaposing the 1857 and 1870 prefaces discloses the developing discourse network about prostitution, and the first edition as a whole makes a good point of comparison to Acton’s later writing. The 1870 edition is more aggressive and encompasses a breadth and scope that the earlier version lacks. A close reading of the later treatise reveals the influence of the nation’s “awakening,” which also marked a significant signpost in the discourse: The contagious prostitute threatens the mind and body of the British Empire. Acton’s 1870 edition of *Prostitution* replicates the knotty tensions about identity and situation that affected constructions of who the prostitute was and where she belonged.

Categorizing the Prostitute

Both editions of *Prostitution* include a chapter on “Prostitution Defined.” Though nearly identical, neither version explicates the act(s) that constitute prostitution; instead, each focuses on the women who made the act possible. Acton discusses how the French “arrange disorderly women” (1; 2nd ed) into two groups, *femmes débauchées* and *prostituées*. According to Acton, in England, the two groups translate into kept mistresses or reserved prostitutes and common streetwalkers. These conflated groupings are all based on disorderly behaviors, acts that destabilize patriarchal definitions of the female body. Acton does see prostitutes as a separate class, and finally articulates a definition of prostitution: “that the fact of ‘hiring,’ whether openly or secretly, whether by an individual or a plurality in succession, constitutes prostitution” (2; 2nd ed). Acton believes that this definition is sufficient enough to “point out the class of persons who ought...to become the objects of legislation” (2; 2nd ed).

Acton’s arguments about “prostitution” are often really about the “prostitute,” a common fallacy in rhetorics of prostitution. An extreme rhetorical shift occurs between the two versions of *Prostitution*. In 1857, Acton argued, “It is no more a necessary consequence that the loss of her honour should divest one woman of the other feminine attributes, than that another who has preserved it should therefore be in all other respects perfect and complete” (4; 1st ed). According to this, the presence or absence of “honour” is not related to the degree of femininity a woman possesses. However, in 1870, Acton argues that the act of prostitution destabilizes the prostitute’s very gender, rendering her less than woman, even less than human: “[The prostitute is] woman with half the woman

gone and that half containing all that elevates her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity; degraded and fallen, she extracts from the sin of others the means of living corrupt and dependent on corruption” (166; 2nd ed). He portrays her as inhuman and parasitic, which conflicts with his earlier stance that identified the prostitutes’ *customers* as parasites (5; 1st ed). This dissonance speaks to the polarization occurring between factions who disagreed on what the prostitute represented—an individual, a fallen woman, a vector of disease, or society’s disgrace.

The moment where destabilization occurred was important to identifying and locating the prostitute. Acton’s treatise repeatedly invokes the site of monetary exchange as the pivotal location for inscription as prostitute. Building upon his basic definition, Acton clarifies that a prostitute is:

A woman who gives for money that which she ought to give only for love; who ministers to passion and lust alone, to the exclusion and extinction of all higher qualities, and nobler sources of enjoyment which combine with desire, to produce the happiness derived from the intercourse of the sexes. (166; 2nd ed)

The moment of economic transaction, when the woman trades her body for money, is when she becomes “a bad burlesque of woman” (166; 2nd ed). The woman’s motives for completing the trade are irrelevant, as is the sex act itself. It is her interaction, as a female, in the public (male) sphere, where she engages in an economic exchanges, that marks her as unsexed and unnatural.

Acton engages directly with the discourse of morality when clarifying who (or what) was a prostitute, and underscores his aggressive rhetoric in the process. In a paper

delivered in December 1869 before the Association of the Medical Officers of Health, he declaimed,

The public should be made fully aware of the fact that we are not legislating for 'soiled doves,' but for a class of women that we may almost call unsexed, who...have so far lost womanly feelings, that they will consort with as many as from eight to twelve different men in the same night. (*Contagious* 24)

These statements employ Victorian cultural values that associated "good" women with "pure" creatures, like doves. This association resonates with the influences of morality and religion, linking suggestions of submission and passivity with goodness in women, with the idealistic angel of the house. These concepts also defined understandings of female sexuality, and Acton postulated, "the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind" (*Functions* 101). A woman who engaged in excessive sexual behaviors, then, was not "normal." Acton's rhetoric persistently dichotomizes women and prostitutes, for the latter are so depraved and degenerate (exemplified here through their excessive sexuality) that they are ungendered.

Acton's rhetoric also locates the male customer's role in prostitution: The prostitute "is in an unnatural state, and so is the man who uses her, and obtains for a mere money consideration that enjoyment of the person which should be yielded only as the result and crowning express of mutual passion..." (163; 2nd ed). However, he implicates the prostitutes' male customers in a way that frames their unnaturalness as a product of, rather than a cause of, prostitution. The belief that "Intercourse with depraved women debases the mind" (166; 2nd ed) permeates *Prostitution*. Thus, prostitutes are responsible

for the moral and intellectual decline of their male customers, “[familiarizing] man with this aspect of woman till he can see no other, and his indulged body and debased mind lead him to seek in them only sensual gratification, and to make, if possible, of every woman the thing that he desires...” (167; 2nd ed). According to this logic, prostitutes are responsible for degeneracy’s spread among the general populace and, perhaps even more alarming, they are responsible for the treatment that “good” women receive at the hands of these now-corrupt men. This reasoning appoints these un-sexed females, themselves victims of a patriarchal and misogynistic discourse, as the victimizers of other females.

Beyond the prostitute’s practices, Acton’s treatises located and relocated the prostitute within public and private, national and domestic spaces. Both editions address prostitution abroad and at home, and the 1870 edition looks at regulatory systems in France, Belgium, Italy, and other countries. Expectedly, given his debt to the work of Parent-Duchâtelet and his own Parisian training, Acton pays a significant amount of attention to France. The majority of his focus, however, is on prostitution at home, and he describes London’s streets as “a standing disgrace...with the disorderly characters that throng them” (205; 2nd ed). The idea of a London threatened by such an epidemic resonated with Victorian readers already inculcated with anxieties about contagion. After all, if the capital city is infected with chaos and disorder, what does that say about the British Empire at large? However, he did argue that there should be one exception to the city’s regulation, which included, in part, denying establishing from making a profit from prostitution: “...it unhappily appears necessary to extend toleration to persons who keep accommodation-houses, otherwise hotels, coffee-houses, and other places of public resort

will become debased” (xi; 2nd ed). Tolerating accommodation-houses, Acton believed, would help restrict the physical locations of prostitutes and maintain the respectability of “places of public resort,” thereby decreasing the spread of prostitution.

Like many other Victorians, Acton associated certain physical spaces with the presence of prostitutes. Pleasure gardens, especially after dark, were often associated with illicit sexual activity, as illustrated by *Evelina*’s Vauxhall Gardens scene discussed in chapter one. Acton’s investigations of the “Haunts of Prostitutes” in the second edition of *Prostitution* include his observations of the Garden at Cremorne on “a pleasant July evening.” The way he frames his account suggests that he expected to witness the “beautiful public garden” transform into an unsafe space: “As calico and merry respectability tailed off eastward by penny steamers, the setting sun brought westward Hansoms freighted with demure immorality in silk and fine linen” (16-7; 2nd ed). Since, by ten o’clock in the evening of his observation, “age and innocence... had seemingly all retired” (17; 2nd ed), it seems that we are about to hear of a scene of debauchery and scandal; the mingling crowd “waltzed, strolled, and fed some thousand souls—perhaps seven hundred of them men of the upper and middle class, the remainder prostitutes more or less *prononcées*” (17; 2nd ed). Yet Acton does not describe the scene as a portrait of urban paranoia, of a “dangerous intermingling of ambiguous bodies” (Rosenman 13). Instead, Acton recounts that he and the “hundreds” of other middle-aged men also present experience nostalgia and rejuvenation through this scene: “The extent of disillusion he has purchased in this world comes forcibly home to the middle-aged man who in such a scene attempts to fathom former faith and ancient joys, and perhaps even vainly to fancy

he might by some possibility begin again” (17; 2nd ed). And he admits that while he had been on a “quest of noise, disorder, debauchery, and bad manners. [It was a] Hopeless task!” (18; 2nd ed). These are rather surprising observations—after all, how can a crowd that contains over three hundred “bad burlesques” of women elicit sentimental nostalgia? Ironically, Acton does not address that the nostalgia elicited by the scene is a common reason for sexual activity as older men seduce younger women in a quest to recapture their youth.

The origins of prostitution were also associated with space. For Acton, the causes of prostitution were feminine in nature, so he turned his attention to role of woman in domestic space. He asserted that women who did not function according to expectation within domestic space—that is, they did not participate in or follow certain domestic acts and practices—were likely candidates for prostitution. Acton specifically cites the inability to marry, an unwillingness to accept the obligations imposed by married life, vicious habits, idleness, and a love of pleasure (177-8; 2nd ed) as causes. A woman’s inability to fulfill expectations of domesticity equated to a violation of domestic space, as it was defined by the patriarchy, and rendered her social position unstable. An unstable woman could, it was believed, become a destabilizing agent and upset social order. As such, destabilized women—prostitutes, in particular—presented a threat to society at large. Because of this, former prostitutes who chose to reform at a Refuge or other charitable house often completed “domestic re-training.” Acton believed that such re-feminizing was necessary to ensure a successful transition out of prostitution because a

“full” woman, rather than a “woman with half the woman gone,” would not prostitute herself (166; 2nd).

As material spaces, domestic centers were also accountable for the spread of prostitution. It was commonly believed that lower-class living conditions bred vice and sexual misconduct and that this rife environment was a primary cause of prostitution. Henry Mayhew declared that the source of prostitution was “*the single bed-chamber in the two-roomed cottage*” (emphasis original, qtd. in Acton 182; 2nd ed). Acton extended Mayhew’s claim to low lodging-houses: “In these detestable haunts of vice...no accommodation is made for decency, and the practices of the inmates are on a par with the accommodation” (182-3; 2nd ed). A lack of cleanliness and order was connected to immorality and disease. Members of the lower class supposedly manifested a lack of moral constancy because of their substandard and dirty environments. Such terrible living conditions would aggravate the instability of women already unable to adequately fulfill their domestic functions and increase their likelihood of engaging in prostitution. To prevent such situations, Acton advocated for regulating lower class living conditions through raised living standards and required housing inspections. Significantly, Acton’s proposal increases the social power exerted by members of the upper classes over members of the lower. In Acton’s reasoning, though, regulation (of the lower classes) for society’s good is a necessary evil; ironically, it would have likely only seemed an evil to those being regulated.

The subhead of the treatise’s second edition rightly emphasizes Acton’s focus upon the “Control and Prevention” of prostitution. Though his rhetoric is often

conflicting, he consistently argues that the spaces inhabited or traversed by prostitutes should be controlled. For example, Acton claims, “We desire to give all possible access of good and helping influences to the prostitute, and to draw her back from her life of sin, but we must be careful in doing this not to give prostitution access to society. Fornication must not come to be regarded here as a *naughty* thing which everybody does” (emphasis original, 230; 2nd ed). This quotation illustrates the assumption that Acton and his male readers can manipulate space and redefine it. His use of spatial terms and concepts emphasize this power: The prostitute must be “drawn” back from her life and denied her “access to society,” effectively isolating her. To achieve these ends, Acton argued that prostitutes no longer be treated as out-patients, that they instead “on the discovery of [their] diseased condition, be confined in hospital and restrained from infecting alike soldiers and civilians” (250; 2nd ed). Again, Acton’s answer to the problem of prostitution is to control the space(s) prostitutes inhabit by enforcing mandatory confinement.

Acton grounded his argument for sequestering prostitutes upon, in part, his concern about infected prostitutes “passing” as uninfected. He recounted seeing an infected patient soliciting that same day: “In dress and bearing she was by no means a female of the lowest class. No ordinary observer would have recognized her sanitary condition” (247; 2nd ed). Acton acknowledged that the woman likely practiced prostitution for economic reasons: “there she was—her rent, her food, her clothes to be earned” (247; 2nd ed.) However, his anecdote depicts her as the contagion, “dangerous alike to the gentle and simple, the fast young man, or the tipsy father” (247; 2nd ed). This “emissary of death,” as Acton calls her, threatens society and should be dealt with

appropriately. He draws a comparison between prostitutes and lunatics, arguing “that the treatment, cure, and temporary segregation of the syphilitic, [is] as much a matter of public interest as that of the lunatic whose seclusion all counties, towns, and parishes provide for with such remarkable alacrity, not so much out of love or respect for him as because he is a dangerous thing to be at large...” (249; 2nd ed). By underscoring the danger that the prostitute presents to society, Acton reinforces the need to restrict or even deny her mobility; such moves to control the space(s) of prostitutes could only be carried out by individuals with great social power, such as medical professionals working under the aegis of government mandate.

Despite their contradictions—or, perhaps, because of them—Acton’s treatises are representative of the evolving discourse about prostitution that focused more on the prostitute than the practices of prostitution. Working in the tradition of Parent-Duchâtelet, Acton attempts a medico-scientific study of the subject that reflects his active engagement with rhetorics of professionalization; he specialized and published to establish his professional ethos and social authority. The editions of *Prostitution* serve as rhetorical evidence of the relationship(s) between identity and space. Specifically, the treatises’ spatial rhetorics used the contagious prostitute as a navigational marker that guided the reader’s formation of knowledge about her—who she was, where she belonged, and what she did. The control and prevention of the prostitute would, according to Acton, be a panacea for the myriad physical and moral contagions threatening nineteenth-century Britain. However, the regulation of space does not guarantee a reconfiguration of identity, a crux that speaks to the fatal flaw of all

contagious disease regulation. Significantly, Acton never prescribes a practical method that ensures the prostitute's reintegration into society after her proposed segregation and subsequent treatment and reformation. Many Victorian texts grappled with this problem, including Wilkie Collin's *The New Magdalen*, the focus of chapter four.

CHAPTER IV

SENSATION AND ANXIETY IN *THE NEW MAGDALEN*

The sensation novel, be it mere trash or something worse, is usually a tale of our own times...a tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting.

– H.L. Mansel, “Sensation Novels”

“Society can subscribe to reclaim me; but Society can’t take me back.”

– Mercy Merrick, *The New Magdalen*

From wild moors to women in white, sensation fiction used anxiety to capture the imagination of its audience, and few writers did so as successfully as Wilkie Collins. Sensation fiction was, quite simply, sensational: It was “drawn to borderlands; it compulsively blurred and transgressed boundaries and knocked down established barriers” (Hughes, “Sensation” 264). Perhaps because of this compulsion to transgress and its need to “preach to the nerves,” sensation fiction portrayed all manner of social ills, from Lady Audley’s bigamous and murderous instincts to Count Foscoe’s nefarious conspiracies (Mansel 482). Such wide-ranging subject matter, which included mistaken identity, bigamy, kidnapping, compelling villains, convoluted plots that intentionally misdirected, fostered a malleable narrative form that encouraged experiments in structure and subject that (re)iterated myriad social anxieties of the Victorian Period.

Sensation fiction was popular because it generated excitement, “as direct as the ‘fight-or-flight’ physiology that renders our reading bodies, neither fighting nor fleeing, theaters of neurasthenia” (Miller, D. 146). Sensation writers, who “saw themselves much more as documentary reporters,” encouraged the association of the genre with reality (Hughes, “Sensation” 264). They advanced this relationship, in part, by crafting plots based upon current events:²⁹

[Sensation writers were not] afraid of blurring the lines between fiction and journalism, since they were generally willing to forego literary verisimilitude in favor of improbable fact...It was the basic premise of the sensation genre that human life, even in Victorian middle-class society, was less tame, less ordinary, less predictable than its readers may have liked to suppose. (264)

By unearthing society’s sometimes-literal skeletons, sensation fiction brought taboo and timely subjects, like bigamy and prostitution, into a public forum. This “realness” was necessary to the genre’s success, as even detractors, like clergyman H.L. Mansel, observed: “Proximity is, indeed, one great element of sensation...a tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting” (Mansel 488-9). Because of this proximity, though, sensation also contributed to social anxieties; readers’ internalization of the genre’s depictions of society heightened existing fears and associations, such as those between urban spaces and danger.

²⁹ Its plots were often derived from current events, and the genre was likened to the “Newspaper Novel,” fiction generated largely from newspapers’ criminal reports; see Manse 501.

Sensation fiction offers a way to understand the development of the individual through the lens of anxiety. The fraught relationship between individual consciousness and reading played a role in the development of the modern subject, which is illustrated in scholarship about the history of the novel. In *How Novels Think*, Nancy Armstrong elucidates, “Novels thus gave tangible form to a desire that set the body on a collision course with limits that the old society had placed on the individual’s options for self-fulfillment, transforming the body from an indicator of rank to the container of a unique subjectivity” (4). This transformation enables shifts in perceptions of difference, which impact the production and reception of literature and the habits of a reading populace. Sensation fiction relied upon manipulations of structure and subject to create and amplify anxiety, and it also relied upon the “unique subjectivity” that enabled and fostered individual desires to seek and engage in sensation.

The success of sensation fiction owed much to a changing literary marketplace, and Lyn Pykett terms the genre a “morbid symptom of modernity” that is “the product of a commodified literary marketplace” (51). The increasing popularity of circulating libraries, railway stalls, and periodicals made procurement of yellow-backs and other mass-produced literature, including the lower-brow sensation fiction, easier for consumers. The economic market encouraged production of sensation fiction, and the easy accessibility for consumers, combined with what was, by 1865, a saturated market, encouraged charges of corruption and degeneration. Similarly to eighteenth-century debates about novel reading, many believed that the genre appealed to readers with weaker characters (i.e. women and the lower classes) and exacerbated those weaknesses.

For instance, Mansel, in his unsigned “Sensation Novels,” published in the April 1863 *Quarterly Review*, attacks the genre’s reliance upon excitement and subsequent morbidity:

excitement, even when harmless in kind, cannot be continually produced without becoming morbid in degree, works of this class manifest themselves as belonging... to the morbid phenomena of literature—indications of a wide-spread corruption, of which they are in part both the effect and the cause; called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing themselves to foster the disease, and to stimulate the want which they supply. (482)

Reading practices influence how the individual is constructed by society and by the self. Those reading lower-brow works were often assumed to be of lesser intelligence, though the popularity of sensation fiction speaks to changing perceptions of the individual and autonomy, as addressed by Armstrong. Personal reading preferences were allowed to challenge social prescription, though rarely without debate.

As a genre form, sensation brought social anxieties into the living room, so to speak; the seemingly outlandish subject matter was placed within the domestic environment, dispelling beliefs that the home was a sacred, protected space. In the manner of other literary forms, sensation fiction helped regulate readers’ internalizations of textual worlds. Mansel recognized this, arguing that sensation fiction “[usurps] in many respects, intentionally or unintentionally, a portion of the preacher’s office, playing no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation” (482). Sensation fiction was a force that bemused and baffled critics. Even in 1890, nearly three decades since its heyday, a critic lamented in an issue of *Blackwood’s*,

“But surely this sensational business must come to an end, or be suspended for half a generation or so...there must surely come satiety at last” (“Crime” 230).

Wilkie Collins, one of sensation fiction’s architects, was known for tackling social issues like identity theft and bigamy, and his work provides an interesting case study for examining the genre’s interaction with social anxieties towards prostitution. Identified by *Vanity Fair* as “The Novelist who invented Sensation” in 1872, Collins purposefully mined current events for material and used his familiarity with medicine, science, and other fields, to craft his narratives (qtd. in Bachman and Cox 9). He paid close attention to authenticity and audience appeal, playing “on precisely those psychological theories that stressed the unpredictable and unconscious workings of the mind as a key method of creating anxiety, suspense and cognitive certainty in his narratives” (Bourne Taylor, “Later” 83). His narratives’ effective play on emotion culminated in bestselling works like *The Woman in White* (1859-60), a novel that remains a touchstone of sensation fiction.

Collins’s cultural knowledge and insight into his readers helped him successfully evoke the emotions of his audience. His work often references the discourses of other fields, particularly psychology and forensic medicine, and he retained a sense of skepticism that enabled him to question and push boundaries when exploring related issues in his works: He “exploits the most striking features of psychological science, but he also questions and satirises its authority as an overweening and at times repressive form of modern knowledge” (Bourne Taylor, “Later” 83). In *The Woman in White*, Collins challenges ideas about identity, madness, wrongful incarceration, marriage, and

Empire—all to the audience’s delight. The bestselling novel “was one of the first examples of what we might today label a ‘media sensation’” (Bachman and Cox 11). *The Woman in White* reflected what Charles Dickens called, “a very great advance on all [of Collins’s] former writing” (Dickens, “Opinion” 627). The novel possessed an intricately wrought plot and memorable characters, especially Count Fosco, as one *Blackwood’s Magazine* review pointed out (Oliphant 641). These qualities all contributed to its success and longevity.

Despite his history of success with sensation fiction, Collins’s attempts post-1870 met with mixed results. His experiments with structure and subject strained credulity, and according to Jenny Bourne Taylor, his later writing, which included *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), *The Law and the Lady* (1875), and *Heart and Science* (1883), was “often regarded as ‘illegitimate’ because it wound up sensation conventions to an increasingly strained pitch, so that what had been a culturally dubious hybrid now became an unsettling montage” (80-1). Collins revisited many of the themes successful in earlier works, “[placing] them in wider, socialized contexts” (83). However, his later works were less successful because of his at-times heavy engagement with social issues such as bigamy, vivisection, and prostitution. The story—the element of utmost importance to Collins—became hampered by social issue commentary, and his later work manifests a fragmentation and unwieldiness not seen in his bestsellers.

A sensation story that Collins replicated in serial, novel, and play form, *The New Magdalen*, begun in 1872, works in the tradition of employing and eliciting anxiety to create sensation. The serial and novel versions begin with the line “It was a dark night.

The rain was pouring in torrents”; this direct echo of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s infamous opening line of his 1830 novel *Paul Clifford* underscores that “purple prose” is important to *The New Magdalen* and that pathos, beyond even what is natural to sensation fiction, will be employed to manipulate the audience (“Purple”).³⁰ However, the narrative of *The New Magdalen* “speaks to the nerves” rather differently than *The Moonstone* or *The Woman in White*, where Collins employs classical elements of gothic intrigue that often resolve through *deus ex machina*. Instead, Collins juggles the sensational elements of *The New Magdalen* with social critique. This particular experiment results in a bricolage of sensational elements, including mistaken/misappropriated identities, the tension between domestic and urban spheres, and the scandalous subject of prostitution. By invoking these topics of real social concerns, Collins exacerbated the existing anxieties of his audiences.

As a narrative experiment, *The New Magdalen*, while daring in its subject matter, superficially presents a clichéd representation of the prostitute and prostitution. For example, the main character’s “fall” into prostitution reverberates with cultural assumptions about space and the prostitute (all women in the streets are vulnerable). The ramped up sentimentality, such as the radical preacher’s influence upon the former prostitute’s spiritual journey, also exhibits the influence of a formulaic narrative regarding the redemption of the fallen woman. My reading, however, argues that by invoking the prostitute figure as his central character, Collins instructs his audience on two primary points: For one, he seems to endorse Victorian beliefs about the danger represented by the prostitute’s ability to transgress borders and to masquerade. Yet, for

³⁰ Bulwer-Lytton’s opening line reads “It was a dark night; the rain fell in torrents...” (1).

two, he also points to the inability of Victorian social codes to “protect” space or to delineate boundaries. By juxtaposing these oppositional ideologies about the prostitute, Collins challenges the dominant discourse about prostitution, a discourse that subverted social reform on multiple platforms, and counters assumptions about space and identity.

Despite its complexity, *The New Magdalen* rarely receives scholarly attention, with the exception of references about the dramatized version’s significance to Collins’s oeuvre as one of his most successful theatre productions. To remedy this lacuna of Collins studies and reclaim the narrative’s value as cultural artifact and social action, this chapter examines how *The New Magdalen* was both production and producer of contagion anxieties as embodied by the female prostitute figure. This case study exposes how the narrative employs the prostitute as a navigational point that directs readers’ (or viewers’) formation of knowledge about space and identity through representations of contagion anxieties as symbolized by the prostitute figure. Reading the prostitute as a complex rhetorical construction disallows her representation as exemplum for all disorderly women and invites an understanding of her function within the cultural geography of the Victorian period.

The New Magdalen as Product and Process

Over the course of six months, Collins produced *The New Magdalen* in serial, volume, and dramatic form.³¹ Generating these versions within the space of a few months

³¹ All in-text citations indicating page numbers from *The New Magdalen* refer to the novel version unless otherwise noted.

exhausted Collins, who wrote, “I am feeling terribly worn out by my exertions. Producing a Serial Story and two Plays in the last six months has been rather too much for me” (Baker 163).³² Collins felt that canvassing multiple media outlets was necessary to protect his authorial interests from lax and confusing copyright regulations. *The New Magdalen* first appeared in serial form, running from October 1872 to July 1873 in *The Temple Bar*, a journal based in London.³³ Collins negotiated its publication in volume form a couple of months before the serial run ended. Hunter, Rose (Toronto) published *The New Magdalen* as a single volume in May-June 1873, and George Bentley (London) published it in two volumes on May 19, 1873 (Baker 162-3). Additionally, as part of Collins’s negotiations, *The New Magdalen: A Dramatic Story in a Prologue and Three Acts* opened at the Olympic Theatre in London on May 19, 1873. It was a successful opening night, even by Collins’s standards. He wrote to Wybert Reeve, “The reception of my *New Magdalen* was prodigious... We have really hit the mark” (Baker, et. al. 406).³⁴ The play ran four months before going on a provincial tour (Baker 163).³⁵

Collins’s background in theatre enabled him to extensively revise and successfully adapt several of his novels, including *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, to the stage. Drama was a personal passion, and he believed that “the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of Fiction; that the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a

³² *Man and Wife* was also produced in 1873.

³³ *The Temple Bar* was launched by John Maxwell in December 1860; the journal merged with publisher George Bentley’s *Bentley’s Miscellany* in 1868.

³⁴ Collins and Reeve were friends and colleagues. Collins asked Reeve to produce and star in *The New Magdalen*, but other commitments prevented him from accepting; he had performed in other Collins plays, including *The Woman in White*’s opening run at Olympic Theatre. See Reeve 113.

³⁵ The first performance of *The New Magdalen* took place at the Globe Theatre in Boston on May 9.

drama acted; and that all the strong and deep emotions which the Play-writer is privileged to excite, the Novel-writer is privileged to excite also” (*Basil* v). Beyond personal preference, lax copyright laws also encouraged cross-production, which led authors to simultaneously produce dramatized versions of their works in an effort to protect their publishing rights. Renata Kobetts Miller argues that novelists who also wrote for the stage were enabled to “explore their relationship to popular reading audiences. These interactions with the theatre provide us with an understanding of how novelists conceived of the place of the novel in relation to other audiences, to other genres, and to Victorian culture” (208). In the manner of film adaptations today, staged productions of novels offered a way for audiences to engage with and better understand the text. For sensation fiction, the theatre provided an especially appropriate forum. Its “self-consciousness about performance” enabled a heightened space for the genre’s “patterns of deception and unmasking” (218). Productions were staged to guide the audience’s emotional response as the sensation plot unfolded. Ideally, the audience’s suspension of disbelief would allow it to engage with the emotions portrayed on stage, and the resulting crescendo of cultivated, communal emotion would generate excitement.

Across its forms, the core story and much of the narrative structure of *The New Magdalen* remains the same, an exercise in literary economy that many scholars have critiqued. A nurse attached to a French ambulance, Mercy Merrick assumes the identity of Grace Roseberry, whom she believes to be dead. The very names of the women—Mercy and Grace—create an ironic association; as the narrative proceeds, Collins depicts the former prostitute as both merciful and graceful, while the lady-by-birth’s portrayal

lacks both. As Grace, Mercy becomes companion to Lady Janet Roy and, subsequently, engaged to Horace Holmcroft, a newspaperman from an established family and seems destined for a fairy tale ending—until Grace reappears, along with Julian Gray. What is unusual, even for sensation fiction, is Mercy’s history of prostitution. Catherine Sutphin comments upon this unusual situation, calling Mercy, “A notable exception to the voiceless, marginal prostitute character...[she] is presented as more virtuous than the novel’s chaste young woman, she is allowed to tell her story, and she is rewarded with marriage to an attractive young clergyman” (513). Casting Mercy as the central character can be seen as one of sensation’s effects upon characterization; according to Winifred Hughes, “The figure of the adventuress, much more prominent than in previous fiction, began to blur into that of the heroine...” (“Sensation” 262). Collins tempers his experiment by narrating the story in third person, rather than making Mercy the narrator. However, through Mercy’s centrality, Collins forces the audience to engage with the character and challenges assumptions about prostitutes’ identities and their locations.

By constructing his main character with palimpsestic identities—first prostitute, then the alias Mercy Merrick, and then Grace Roseberry—Collins challenges reductive readings of the prostitute figure. Unlike the “fallen woman” who possesses no social worth until her redemption (if then), the main character of *The New Magdalen* embodies the agency and disregard of social codes that fed Victorian contagion anxieties about the prostitute. In this way, the narrative and its main character participate in and, simultaneously, are produced by Victorian discourse. And throughout this discursive

process, the complex main character functions as a navigational point that influences the reader's interpretation.

In *The New Magdalen*, the main character's function as a directional point manifests through the conversation(s) about the professions that take place in the narrative. Three careers are specifically referenced: doctors, journalists, and writers. As I have established elsewhere in this dissertation, rhetorics of professionalization often employed the rhetorical construction of the prostitute as a point of resistance against which social authority could be asserted and ethos strengthened. In order to use the prostitute as a rhetorical scapegoat, these rhetorics had to construct her as less-than woman, even less-than human. Collins's audience would have been familiar with this presentation of the prostitute through texts like Acton's *Prostitution*, among others. By presenting social critiques of medicine, journalism, and literature, Collins raises questions about these professions' social authority and, indirectly, suggests that his audience should question how these fields construct the prostitute figure, as represented by his main character.

Deception and masking operate as the frame for medical critique that delivers a jab at French medicine while asserting the superiority of German medicine. Though the French surgeon Surville declares Grace dead, the German physician, Ignatius Wetzel, disagrees with the diagnosis: "The Frenchman is a Quack! The Frenchman is an Ass!" (Collins, *New* 41). After performing emergency brain surgery in the dingy and ill-equipped cottage, Wetzel brings Grace "back to life." This sensational moment is

emphasized by the fact that it is Wetzel who also brings Mercy-as-Grace to life.³⁶ Prior to surgery, he finds Mercy's handkerchief in Grace's pocket, and upon reading the name "Mercy Merrick" aloud and assigning it to the apparent corpse, Mercy is free to become "Grace Roseberry" (39). The German physician's rudeness and disregard of her person encourages Mercy to allow his "delusion" that he correctly identified the dead/injured woman.

Divisive social attitudes towards the British medical field, despite its relatively cohesive authority in 1873, are also evident in *The New Magdalen*. Lady Janet's treatment of Mercy post-dénouement reflects her view of individuality as subjective, and Horace's views reflect his belief that society's hierarchy dictates the formation of the individual. Such beliefs about "the individual" whether it is "an indicator of rank [or a] container of a unique subjectivity" directly impacts body and response to social authority (Armstrong, *How* 3). Lady Janet, for instance, voices several critiques of the medical profession that question that authority, and though she does express the value, or perhaps the usefulness, of a "medical" opinion, she doesn't see the physician's diagnosis as infallible. For instance, when discussing Grace-as-Mercy's suspected madness with Horace, she states, "I do not feel justified in acting on my own opinion that [Grace-as-Mercy's] mind is deranged. In the case of this friendless woman I want medical authority, and more even than that, I want some positive proof, to satisfy my conscience as well as confirm my view" (Collins, *New* 102). In this case, Lady Janet retains her autonomy and

³⁶ To distinguish the characters of Mercy and Grace during the period when their identities are switched, I identify them, respectively, Mercy-as-Grace and Grace-as-Mercy.

does not give medical authority the power to dictate her decisions; instead, the medical opinion will simply contribute to what she hopes is evidence of Grace-as-Mercy's madness. In another instance, Lady Janet delivers the derisive line, "The medical profession thrives on two incurable diseases in these modern days—a He-disease and a She-disease. She-disease—nervous depression; He-disease—suppressed gout..." (107). Her derision is amplified in the dramatized version: "The doctor! I brought [Mercy-as-Grace] back yesterday to consult the doctor. He knows no more about it than I do. He has just gone away with two guineas in his pocket. One guinea for advising me to keep her quiet. Another guinea for telling me to trust to time. The medical profession thrives..." (45). Lady Janet's lack of reverence for medical authority belies the rejection of social norms that enables her love and support of Mercy despite the younger woman's ruse.

In contrast, Horace's support of the medical field's hierarchy reflects his support of social hierarchy and its dictates. According to Horace's correspondence with Grace, included in the epilogue, he arranged for an "eminent physician" to attend Julian during the clergyman's illness. Horace judges that the physician "behaved admirably. Though he has risen from the lower order of the people, he has, strange to say, the instincts of a gentleman. He...felt all the importance of preventing such a person as Mercy Merrick from seizing the opportunity of intruding herself at the bedside" (Collins, *New* 268-9). This "appropriate" behavior is compared to that of the "local doctor...a young man (and evidently a red-hot radical)" who advocated for Mercy to be sent for, having "nothing to do with the lady's character, and with [Horace's] opinion of it" (269). This prescription,

which flaunts society's rules for "outcasts from the Streets," offends both Horace and the eminent physician, and they leave.

These examples show that the medical field can be analyzed within the contexts of social attitudes towards the prostitute figure. Lady Janet and Horace's interactions with medical professionals betray their respective attitudes about the concept of "the individual," which, in turn, echoes their treatment of Mercy: Lady Janet can embrace Mercy despite her life on the streets, while Horace rejects her as symptomatic of the evils threatening his rigidly defined notion of society. Attitudes towards fields actively engaged in professionalizing, then, are intricately connected to attitudes about the individual: To believe in a hierarchy of professionals, one must believe in a hierarchy of individualities.

While the journalism field relied upon a hierarchy of product (i.e. *The London Times* outselling other newspapers by the thousands, for instance) and garnered less respect than the medical profession, *The New Magdalen* assigns a significant amount of social power to the newspaper medium, including the power to influence and to inform. This social power was put into practice through the dissemination of stories about rejected members of society, like prostitutes, to a diverse audience that included women. This can be seen in Mercy's first conversation with Grace: "You read the newspapers like the rest of the world," [Mercy] went on; "have you ever read of your unhappy fellow-creatures (the starving outcasts) of the population whom Want has driven into Sin?" (Collins, *New* 15). In this way, Grace, along with the rest of society, is implicated in perpetuating the social situation (want) that produces prostitution. *The New Magdalen*

also portrays newspapers as sensational because they picked up the story of Mercy, as a starving, orphaned child, and made her a minor *cause célèbre* for a short period. In such instances, the press' gaze manipulated reader response by exaggerating elements to elicit sensation. In other instances, people sought accomplishments that might result in a newspaper item, leading Lady Janet to contemplate, "Does anybody do anything nowadays (fighting included) without wishing to see it in the newspapers?" (Collins 48). When "read" through the press' gaze, one became both educator and education, which instilled a certain degree of power. For example, Mercy's testimony before the magistrate informed the courts of the circumstances that resulted in her dire straits, and when transformed into a sensational news story, Mercy's power to inform expanded, and her story educated the newspaper's readers. Newspapers' ability to facilitate this exchange speaks to its social power, which was well recognized by 1873.

Though some aspects of journalism were not entirely vetted, the role of foreign correspondents, particularly during war, was exceptionally valued. Without the regular and current reports from the war zones, readers at home received delayed information that was often inaccurate by the time of its receipt. Horace meets Mercy-as Grace on the frontlines, and as a newspaperman, he knowingly wields social power. During their first conversation, he brags, "I possess the influence that no one can resist...the influence of the Press" (Collins, *New* 37). On the frontier, Horace's clout makes the young woman's unquestioned passage through German lines possible. Considering how the narrative ends, Horace's facilitation of Mercy-as-Grace's passing and her journey to London and, ultimately, to Mablethorpe House is rather ironic.

In addition to acknowledging and critiquing the professional power of medicine and journalism in British society, Collins's writing and publishing of the different forms of *The New Magdalen* speaks to the professionalizing of the literary field, and the narrative itself reflects his philosophy about that process. At one point, the narrator states, "Those persons who study writing as an art are probably the only persons who can measure the vast distance which separates a conception as it exists in the mind from the reduction of that conception to form and shape in words" (Collins, *New* 174). This claim speaks to the discernment required of writers even as it establishes justification for the discrepant or incredulous: Since writers are acutely aware of and grapple with the chasm between mental conception and textual representation, their art reflects the mimetic distance that exists between what they can imagine and what they can represent, as well as what the audience imagines and interprets. The claim also acknowledges that writers, as observers of society, are uniquely equipped with the ability to quantify the "vast distance." Through his narrator's commentary, Collins reminds his audience that while the author's vision of *The New Magdalen* may not be fully represented in the final product, his ability to imitate that vision is exceptional.

The New Magdalen also reflects a common critique of the literature profession while acknowledging literature's power in disseminating social norms. In the epilogue, Grace praises Horace's "most interesting and delightful letter" for his keen judgment about Mercy, Julian, and Lady Janet (Collins, *New* 266). She bemoans that the profession is not elevated enough for someone as "good" as him: "If Literature stood a little higher as a profession, I should almost advise you—but no! if you entered Literature, how could

you associate with the people whom you would be likely to meet?” (266). The implication is that literature—with its power to influence the individual and, thus, society—would benefit from Horace’s wisdom, but Horace, because of his breeding and keen judiciousness, cannot allow himself to associate with the class of people who normally enter the writing profession. To do otherwise risks exposure to unsavory elements and their effects.

Social propaganda was circulated by many fields, including medicine, journalism, and literature. Sometimes, participation in its dissemination was intentional as certain subjects, such as the prostitute, were used to establish binaries. At other times, participation was subconscious, as texts interacted with the discourses from which they were formed. Collins uses *The New Magdalen* as a vehicle to raise the awareness of his audience about the plight of the prostitute, while heightening anxieties about her role. As Mercy reprimands Horace and Julian, and thereby the audience of *The New Magdalen*,

You, who have your solicitors to inform you of legal remedies and your newspapers, circulars, and active friends to sound the praises of charitable institutions continually in your ears—you, who possess these advantages, have no idea of the outer world of ignorance in which your lost fellow-creatures live... Take as much pains to make charities and asylums known among the people without money as are taken to make a new play, a new journal, or a new medicine known among the people with money and you will save many a lost creature who is perishing now. (Collins, *New* 239)

Mercy’s exhortation implicates the members of these professions and circles, those who spent time disseminating ideas instead of *doing* something. Of course, this is the conundrum of social activism: The “lost creature” cannot be considered lost without an opposite against which to be defined and *vice versa*. Reading *The New Magdalen* as both

product and process, as replicate and replicator of Victorian discourse, facilitates a conversation about its contributions to anxieties about contagion as symbolized by the prostitute.

Locating *The New Magdalen*

Though scholars like Catherine Peters argue that *The New Magdalen* suffers because it was “written with dramatization in mind, with limited settings, exits, entrances, critical encounters between pairs of characters, and much dialogue” (337), I suggest that re-reading Collins’s limited representations of material—domestic—spaces in *The New Magdalen* as both “document” and “agency of cultural history,” exposes the complications that underlie associations between space and identity and the ways those associations perform acts of norming and limning (Armstrong, *How* 23-4). A plethora of spatial concepts are employed in *The New Magdalen*, from Mercy’s loss of her “place” in society to Grace’s assured “position” with Lady Janet Roy. Mutuality exists between literal and figurative place and identity. Changes in place produce shifts in identity and *vice versa*. In the following section, I examine the spatial rhetorics of the novel *The New Magdalen*, exploring how constructions of Mercy’s spaces and identities are connected.

The central actions of *The New Magdalen* are located within the domestic sphere, namely a frontier cottage and a manor house. The narrative does tangentially connect to other spaces, including the Refuge, the Holmcroft family home, and Kensington Gardens. London is referenced too, as allusions establish the city as prostitution’s epicenter: “The dusky glare of lighted London...seemed to beckon [Mercy] back to the horror of the cruel

streets” (Collins, *New* 175). The portrayals of these spaces importantly figure into *The New Magdalen*’s narrative world, establishing that anxieties about contagion, the urban paranoia elicited by prostitutes and prostitution, had infected private domiciles.

The first scene of *The New Magdalen* opens in “The Cottage on the Frontier,” a miller’s cottage appropriated by the French in the middle of a skirmish with the Germans. Archetypally, war represents and spreads chaos and disorder; in *The New Magdalen*, war has repurposed both the cottage and Mercy. As a former prostitute, Mercy herself is a disorderly figure, but on the chaotic warfront, only her function as a nurse matters.³⁷ Collins meticulously describes the miller’s cottage that consists of two rooms, one of which is the bedchamber. While many social authorities, including Henry Mayhew and William Acton, identified “the single bed-chamber in the two-roomed cottage” as the root of the Great Social Evil, in *The New Magdalen*, such a cottage serves as headquarters for Captain Arnault and a hospital for his wounded soldiers (qtd. in Acton 182; 2nd ed). The edifice’s transformation includes removing the boundary—the wooden door—that separated the sleeping and living spaces; this door is now used to carry wounded soldiers in from the battlefield. The bedchamber, with its wood fire, the miller’s empty sacks, solid walnut bed, and colored prints “representing a happy mixture of devotional and

³⁷ During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale initiated the transformation of “nursing from the Dickensian image of the nurse as a drunk or prostitute and shaped it into an emerging profession”; See O’Connor 713. However, Nightingale’s reforms could not naturalize the sexual politics associated with nursing. As Brake and Demoor argue, “The well-documented shift from an occupation drawn from domestic servants, paupers and prostitutes to a preponderance of educated middle- and upper-class women also meant that the identity of nursing was fraught from within its ranks as well as pressurized from without” (462). Also see Judd’s *Bedside Seductions: Nursing and the Victorian Imagination, 1830-1880*.

domestic subjects,” becomes Arnault’s ready room. A piece of canvas now separates this room from the kitchen that has been repurposed as an infirmary. This conversion of private/domestic space into public space exemplifies the fraught and permeable boundaries challenged throughout *The New Magdalen*.

The characterization of Mercy particularly challenges these boundaries. She is “tall, lithe, and graceful,” and “there was an innate nobility in the carriage of this woman’s head, an innate grandeur in the gaze of her large gray eyes and in the lines of her finely proportioned face, which made her irresistibly striking and beautiful, seen under any circumstances and clad in any dress” (Collins, *New* 10). From this introductory description, Collins establishes the nurse as a woman whose physical attributes make transitions of space (circumstances) and identity (dress) possible. We are also given foreshadowing as to her “real” location within the narrative from the description of her attire: a careful, neat uniform of black and white, “with the scarlet cross of the Geneva Convention embroidered on her left shoulder” (10).³⁸ Like Hester Prynne, Mercy’s scarlet emblem identifies her to the public.³⁹ Unlike Hester, though the cross invites questions about Mercy’s background and identifies her as a public figure, it also extends protection to her as a neutral figure on the battlefield. This is why, when the French are planning their evacuation, Mercy says she will stay behind with the men because “the red

³⁸ The marking of a red cross on a white background identified the medical personnel, transports, and equipment indiscriminately aiding wounded and sick military personnel on the battlefield, per the accords of the 1864 Geneva Convention.

³⁹ Hester Prynne is the protagonist in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850.

cross will protect me” (22). However, her neutrality exists only on the battlefield; in everyday society, Mercy, when recognized as a former prostitute, instigates discord.

Nursing was one of the limited occupations open to reformed prostitutes, as it, like prostitution, required interacting in the public sphere, albeit in a different manner. As Mercy explains to Grace, “Society can find a use for me here. My hand is as light, my words of comfort are as welcome, among those suffering wretches...as if I was the most reputable woman breathing. And if a stray shot comes my way before the war is over—well! Society will be rid of me on easy terms” (Collins, *New* 19). Under “normal” conditions, Mercy’s status as a former prostitute negates any attempt on her part to belong to society; she knows this, as her cynical but accurate view about the repercussions of a stray shot shows. Mercy is successful as a nurse and lives up to her name; though the role of angel in the house may be denied to her, the role of angel of mercy is not, and she ably provides solace to the seriously wounded men left behind after Captain Arnault and his men retreat from the advancing Germans:

A cry of delight welcomed her appearance—the mere sight of her composed the men. From one straw bed to another she passed with comforting words that gave them hope, with skilled and tender hands that soothed their pain. They kissed the hem of her black dress, they called her their guardian angel, as the beautiful creature moved among them, and bent over their hard pillows her gentle, compassionate face. (29)

Collins’s depiction of Mercy as a maligned Angel of the House, as a woman who, if not for her sordid past, would present as the angelic ideal, is crucial. As a former prostitute, Mercy represents the unknown and the unknowable. Casting her as a woman of grace and

goodness comforts an audience whose anxieties are already being preyed upon by the narrative's sensational factors.

Collins's construction of the narrative invites questioning of Mercy's so-called "innate goodness," though. For instance, as a result of the skirmishing, those in the French cottage are in black-out mode. Repeatedly, Arnault cautions against opening the shutters, as the light from within the cottage will betray the headquarters' position to German scouts. However, after an unpleasant verbal exchange with Grace, Mercy goes to the window, where she "unfastens the wooden shutter and looks out" (Collins, *New* 20). The nurse stands there, looking out. The "friendly darkness" that has hidden the French, as well as Mercy's past, is lifting with the moon's ascension: "In a few hours more (if nothing happened) the English lady might resume her journey. In a few hours more the morning would dawn" (20). While the narrative's arc heavy-handedly depicts Mercy as self-sacrificing and "good," this passage can be read skeptically as foreshadowing of Mercy's ideas. The information shared in parentheses foreshadows that something is, in fact, going to happen, and it does: Shells and shots begin falling near the cottage, and Grace panics and begins running around the room seeking escape. As she tries to open the barred door that leads outside, the shell bursts hit her; Mercy remains unharmed.

Because Mercy is not oblivious to the dangers of war, we are left to wonder if Mercy left the shutters open because she either desired death or was attempting to draw the chaos of war directly into the room she shared with her nemesis: a woman with an honest reputation. The ambiguity of this moment is reinforced by Mercy's internal dialogue: "Not five minutes since...I was longing to change places with *you*!...I wish I

could change places now!” (Collins, *New* 25). While Grace’s apparent death can easily be attributed to the happenstance horrors of war, we should consider that despite warnings, Mercy not only opened the shutters, but she kept them open and stood in the light that inevitably filtered out into the night. To further read between the lines, we should ask ourselves what Collins left *out* of this narrative to make it work, what aspects of Mercy’s character were downplayed or only insinuated in order to avoid alienating his audience.

Collins never directly addresses Mercy’s ability to imagine beyond her circumstances, though it is subtly present throughout the narrative. Many expected a woman in Mercy’s position to penitently endure the results of her actions and to gratefully accept what, if any, help society offered. But Mercy does not conform to such dictates, and the narrative clearly details her imaginings: “A strange fancy had sprung to life in her mind...That fancy of hers was not to be dismissed at will. Her mind was perversely busy now with an imaginative picture of the beauty of Mablethorpe House and the comfort and elegance of the life that was led there...” (Collins, *New* 30). Her ability to superimpose a vision of domestic sanctity and bliss upon the chaos of war emphasizes her dangerousness as a figure of public disorder; she can see beyond this chaotic space and its impact upon identity to what *might* be. And her location in a chaotic and disordered war zone affords her the opportunity to change her identity and re-enter society, consequently disordering society’s order.

I argue for a reading of Mercy that resists the trite suggestions of the narrative regarding her virtue and goodness and focuses on the contradictions of Mercy’s character. This approach restores Mercy’s agency, rather than depicting her as a victim of

society. For example, Mercy is highly aware of her circumstances and persistently engages with the idea of transformation. Though the narrative never identifies the character trait that encourages awareness of potential change, some might term it ambition. For example, after deciding to assume Grace's identity, Mercy carefully considers her appearance. Collins frames her careful scrutiny as gendered behavior, avoiding the suggestion that she is calculating and aggressive:

The ineradicable instinct of the sex directed her eyes to her dress, before the Germans appeared. Looking it over to see that it was in perfect order, her eyes fell upon the red cross on her left shoulder. In a moment it struck her that her nurse's costume might involve her in a needless risk. It associated her with a public position; it might lead to inquiries at a later time, and those inquiries might betray her. (Collins, *New* 35)

Besides directing a kindly interpretation of Mercy's behavior, this passage performs several functions: Collins's use of the phrase "ineradicable instinct" reasserts Mercy's femininity, countering the belief that prostitution unsexed women. Mercy's concern about her "nurse costume" reflects society's dependence upon physical cues to categorize people and reinforces the fallibility of such a system. If her nursing outfit is a "costume," then Mercy sees herself inhabiting a role that is not in accord with her authentic self. And, lastly, the passage reveals that Mercy plans ahead and considers difficulties that may cross her path. While her spoken words suggest her role as a sympathetic character and victim of society, her actions consistently subvert the position(s) society has attempted to assign her. Reading Mercy's "parenthetical" actions as ambitious counters the prevailing commonplaces that her speech reinforces. This dissonance exacerbates anxieties and resists the possibility of the tidy resolutions common to sensation fiction.

The New Magdalen engages with the theory that prostitutes—in this case, Mercy—assimilate themselves as the “wives and mothers of Englishmen” touted by Acton in his treatises about prostitution, so anxieties about the integrity of domestic spaces figure importantly in this narrative world. The urban paranoia about certain contagions, like the prostitute, had spread from the public streets into the private, domestic spaces of the home. As Winifred Hughes argues, “the middle class home, which remained at the core of so much of Victorian culture, could no longer be counted on to function as a refuge from horrors or from the brutalities of an encroaching urban and industrial society” (“Sensation” 261). Collins’s move to place Mercy, a former prostitute who is successfully masquerading as a woman with an honest reputation, plays to fears about the “intermingling of ambiguous bodies,” as well as worries that the domestic sphere was infected by corruption and degeneration (Rosenman 13). The introduction of the unknown into a formerly known space gives rise to mysteries and secrets, which Lady Janet considers a form “of ill-breeding” (Collins, *New* 74). Horace articulates clearly the concerns and dis-ease that arise from the unknown’s invasion:

We have no secrets and mysteries at home. And as for quarrels—ridiculous! My mother and my sisters are highly bred women...; gentlewomen, in the best sense of the word. When I am with *them* I have no anxieties. I am not harassed at home by doubts of who people are, and confusion about names and so on. I suspect the contrast weighs a little on my mind and upsets it. They make me over-suspicious among them here, and it ends in my feeling doubts and fears that I can’t get over... (225)

If instability and disorder invade the home, represented in *The New Magdalen* by a prostitute's infiltration of an upper class Victorian home, then destabilization of the female body and of spaces inhabited by the female occurs.

Collins takes great pains to describe the primary setting of *The New Magdalen*: Lady Janet Roy's Mablethorpe House, an "ancient mansion" in Kensington, a London suburb. For instance, the opening scene occurs during lunch in the dining room with Lady Janet, Horace Holmcroft, and Mercy-as-Grace. The room is meticulously described:

To the educated eye the dining-room, with its modern furniture and conservatory, its ancient walls and doors, and its lofty mantelpiece (neither very old nor very new), presents a startling, almost a revolutionary, mixture of the decorative workmanship of widely differing schools. To the ignorant eye the one result produced is an impression of perfect luxury and comfort, united in the friendliest combination, and developed on the largest scale. (44)

Within this environment, drama unfolds. An audience familiar with the tropes of sensation fiction would have recognized that the beauty of the old home belies dangerous secrets that will soon be revealed. This familiarity contributed to anxieties about the domestic space. Hughes writes, "In criminalizing the Victorian home, the sensation novels succeeded in defamiliarizing it. Characters and readers could no longer take it comfortably for granted; instead they were forced to become increasingly suspicious of whatever looked most familiar and ordinary" ("Sensation" 263). This cultivated suspicion encouraged the loss of sanctity often awarded to domestic spaces; for example, at one point, those inside of Mablethorpe are referred to as "inmates of the house" by the narrative (Collins, *New* 65).

The authority of Mablethorpe manor is sanctioned by the reputation of its owner,

Lady Janet Roy, “the childless widow of a long-forgotten lord” who is known by “everybody with the slightest pretension to experience in London society” (Collins, *New* 45). Lady Janet’s authority benefits Mercy, for by accepting Mercy-as-Grace on sight, she sets a precedent that others follow, even when the real Grace Roseberry instigates a confrontation. Her personal authority is such that she retorts to Julian’s query about Mercy-as-Grace’s identity with a sharp, “Did you think I had picked up a foundling?” (71). In the four months that elapse between scenes, Mercy essentially becomes Lady Janet’s “adopted daughter,” and adeptly fulfills her duties as companion. According to the narrative, “To herself alone she is known as the outcast of the London streets; the inmate of the London Refuge; the lost woman who has stolen her way back—after vainly trying to fight her way back—to Home and Name” (46). In her guise as Grace, Mercy has also encouraged the attentions of Horace Holmcroft, the newspaperman who helped her pass through the German lines and who coincidentally recuperated from a war injury at the home of his long-time friend Lady Janet. When Horace professed his love, he found “willing ears.” This phrase insinuates that Mercy-as-Grace welcomed his advances, which implies that she was willing to marry him despite her “depraved” background and true identity. This is yet another clue that Mercy possesses ambition. The text immediately contradicts the idea that Mercy is truly willing to accept Horace, however: “From that moment it was only a question of persisting long enough in the resolution to gain his point” (49). While this textual inconsistency can be attributed to Collins’s hasty writing or simply a misreading, I interpret this textual slippage as the inability to “contain” the prostitute figure: A “good” woman who was a prostitute of no fault of her

own would not willingly accept the advances of a “good” man (nor would she steal the identity of a lady, no matter the circumstances) yet a good woman would not be a prostitute. The conundrum confounds any true resolution for the narrative.

Though Collins presents Mercy as a maligned Angel of the House, as a woman who, except for her unfortunate past, constitutes the ideal Victorian lady, the subtle suggestions that Mercy possesses agency contradicts this image. Such inconsistencies are problematic; an audience is more likely to feel comfortable with a maligned Angel as heroine than with an imperfect woman who acts upon her own desires (such as stealing the identity of a dead woman to ensure a better future for herself). The suggestions that Mercy is the latter are embedded in the text and secondary to Collins’s protestations that his character is gentle, graceful, and kind. For instance, he begins the paragraph that details the sequence of events leading to Mercy and Horace’s engagement with a disclaimer regarding the former’s character: “Mercy had been mad enough to listen to [Horace], and to love him. But Mercy was not vile enough to marry him under her false character, and in her false name” (Collins, *New* 49). With this persuasive lead-in, the rest of the paragraph’s details are presented through a specific screen: Mercy loves Horace but will not injure his identity with hers.

Mercy’s masquerade operated successfully within the environs of Mablethorpe, yet the narrative places little confidence in her success outside its confines, as shown in references to Mercy and Horace’s impending marriage. For example, “As a connection of Lady Janet’s by marriage,” Mercy-as-Grace will be a welcome addition to the family (Collins, *New* 49). However, the text reinforces the couple’s incompatibility by

repeatedly invoking the domestic center of the Holmcroft family home, comprised of Horace's mother and sisters who were "high authorities in his estimation" and "represented his deal of perfection in women" (58). Consequently, Horace often and unfavorably compares his fiancée to his role models for femininity: "It would be well, Grace, if you followed the example set you by my mother and my sisters... *They* are not in the habit of speaking cruelly to those who love them" (58-9). This comparison suggests a regulation of Mercy's external and internal behaviors that is not entirely successful. Though Mercy does ask forgiveness because "How should he know it, poor fellow, when he innocently mortified her" (59), Horace fails to fully control her thoughts and emotions:

There was a spirit in her—a miserable spirit, born of her own bitter experience—which rose in revolt against Horace's habitual glorification of the ladies of his family. 'It sickens me,' she thought to herself, 'to hear of the virtues of women who have never been tempted! Where is the merit of living reputably, when your life is one course of prosperity and enjoyment? Has his mother known starvation? Have his sisters been left forsaken in the street?' It hardened her heart—it almost reconciled her to deceiving him- when he set his relatives up as patterns for her. Would he never understand that women detested having other women exhibited as examples to them? (59)

Collins uses the rhetorical trope of inner dialogue to draw attention to the difference between "being" and "seeming." Mercy's actions (asking forgiveness and kissing Horace's forehead tenderly) perpetuate the image of the Angel of the House, but her internal dialogue reveals that her compliance is only superficial. Her thoughts emphasize the disparity in life experience between females protected and insulated by social class and females, like Mercy, who are not. They also expose, rather dramatically, the

difference between internal and external worlds and suggest that other women who outwardly conform to the Angel of the House ideal are actually something very different.

Mercy's masquerade only begins to unravel after the introduction of Julian Gray's physical presence into the Mablethorpe environment. When she discovers that Julian is the nephew of Lady Janet, she appears "perfectly panic-stricken" to Horace (Collins, *New* 61). The narrative explains Mercy's alarm: "To her mind the personation of Grace Roseberry had suddenly assumed a new aspect: the aspect of a fatality" (60). Her journey to Mablethorpe takes on the semblance of a "hard pilgrimage" that has led her to "the man who had reached her inmost heart" and has brought her to "the day of reckoning" (241, 60-1). Julian becomes Mercy's spiritual point of reference, influencing her actions and checking her deceptions, and the narrative quickly builds to her climactic confession and its consequences.

The character we know as Mercy recognizes and understands the reciprocal relationship shared between space and identity. As she tells Julian and Horace, "I have always felt the aspiration, no matter how low I may have fallen, to struggle upward to a position above me; to rise, in spite of fortune, superior to my lot in life" (Collins, *New* 233). Mercy's skill in transgressing boundaries of physical spaces significantly relates to her experience with exclusionary and transitory spaces, which are interconnected as the act of exclusion (or transition) often leads to the other. Mercy's ambitious acts lead to Grace repeatedly calling her a "vile adventuress." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "adventuress," in its nineteenth-century context, as "A female adventurer; a woman on the look-out for a position." While personal initiative is welcomed in the modern female

subject, in the late-nineteenth-century, ideas and behaviors like Mercy's threatened the status quo of society on multiple levels. Simply put, a prostitute, as exemplum for all disorderly women, who possessed a complex personality and the ability to negotiate and manipulate space and identity endangered society.

(Dis)Locating Mercy Merrick

Collins created a rather clichéd personal history for Mercy, but one that, according to common social beliefs, explains her adaptability and penchant for duality. Her earliest memory is of life with a company of strolling players to which her mother belonged, which means that Mercy was essentially born into masquerade. During this happy period, Mercy learned “the profession” and was performing for the public by the age of five:

I was the favorite pet and plaything of the poor actors. They taught me to sing and to dance at an age when other children are just beginning to learn to read...[I] had made my poor little reputation in booths at country fairs. As early as that...I had begun to live under an assumed name—the prettiest name they could invent for me ‘to look well in the bills’...learning to sing and dance in public often meant learning to bear hunger and cold in private. (Collins, *New* 231)

Mercy performed with the company until she was ten, when her mother died and the strolling company broke up. Though the girl was included in a deal that engaged two of the players in another company, Mercy did not fare well and, beaten for a mistake during performance, ran away. In the ensuing years, she begged, worked for gypsies, gathered hop, sold matches, worked in service, and performed needlework—all livelihoods often depicted as leading to prostitution and other vice.

Collins takes the clichés one step further, however, in his depiction of Mercy's "misstep" that leads her into prostitution. Rather than imbuing her with the agency to initially choose the lifestyle over starvation, starvation makes her a victim to the lifestyle. After fainting in the street from hunger, Mercy is raped, though she does not know by whom or by how many; she only knows that she wakes once to a man coaxing her to drink a cordial, and she awakens in an unfamiliar bed: "A nameless terror seized me. I called out. Three or four women came in whose faces betrayed, even to my inexperienced eyes, the shameless infamy of their lives" (Collins, *New* 237). After this, Mercy says that she is too ashamed to return to "honest" people and drifts into a life of prostitution. While the narrative omits extensive details of her life as a prostitute, it divulges that she has also been imprisoned for theft, though she claims that she was framed. The prison matron took an interest in her, however, and introduced her to the matron at the Refuge. Mercy states, "From this time the story of my life is little more than the story of a woman's vain efforts to recover her lost place in the world" (240). And, indeed, the narrative revolves around Mercy's locations and dislocations.

Throughout *The New Magdalen*, Collins emphasizes Victorian society's tenets about the necessity of possessing a proper "character," without which one could not achieve a proper and stable "place." For women, the need to carefully negotiate and maintain their character and social position was essential because "[they] live, poor things, in the opinions of others" (Collins, *New* 273). Once lost, it was difficult to restore society's good opinion, as Mercy discovered firsthand. After earning a character at the Refuge, she assumed the name Mercy Merrick, yet she still faced difficulty. Mercy was

first placed in service, and though a faithful servant, once her Refuge history was discovered, she was dismissed. She then went to Canada and worked for an officer's wife. It was a "pleasant, peaceful" position that led Mercy to wonder, "Is the lost place regained? *Have I got back?*" (17). She had not. After her mistress' death, Mercy's self-confessed fatal flaw—her beauty—raised suspicions about her relationship with her master. She returned to the Refuge, trained as a nurse, and found herself in the cottage on the frontier where the story begins.

Collins constantly reiterates Mercy's inability to reclaim her lost place in society, yet her persistence reinforces that what he leaves *out* of the narrative is just as important, if not more so, than what he includes. Early in the narrative, for example, Mercy ponders the futility of her circumstances: "Go where she might, do what she might, it would always end the same way...the shadow of the old disgrace surrounding her as with a pestilence, isolating her among other women, branding her, even when she had earned her pardon in the sight of God..." (Collins, *New* 30). Unable to escape this exclusion, Mercy's decision to take on Grace's identity seems, if not justified, at least understandable, as does her excitement at the opportunity: "What a prospect it was! A new identity, which she might own anywhere! A new name, which was beyond reproach! A new past life, into which all the world might search, and be welcome" (31). Because Mercy believes Grace to be dead, Collins leads us to associate Mercy's appropriation of the other woman's identity with a desire for self-betterment and redemption rather than anything mercenary. He drives the point home with additional evidence of Mercy's reluctance to become Grace: Upon arriving in England, she tried once more to stop her

masquerade and return to the Refuge, but she “stopped on the opposite side of the street, looking at it. The old hopeless life of irretrievable disgrace confronted me as I fixed my eyes on the familiar door; the horror of returning to that life was more than I could force myself to endure” (242). Mercy’s inability to subject herself to the horror of hopelessness and disgrace situates her as a sympathetic character, though there are gaps that suggest otherwise.

Additionally, Collins, in true sensation fashion, bequeaths Mercy with a mysterious family lineage that cannot be proven. Her mother was a young woman with prospects until a rash marriage with a family servant that ended badly, and her father was “a man of high rank, proud of his position, and well known in the society of that time for his many accomplishments and his refined tastes” (Collins, *New* 230). In the chapter titled “Magdalen’s Apprenticeship,” Mercy attributes her fatal flaw of beauty to her mother and her pride and ambition to her father. Interestingly, Mercy does not acknowledge her acting experience’s impact upon her life, though most former prostitutes would lack the knowledge of social graces and self-presentation required to “be” Grace. Mercy’s emphasis of her lineage suggests that masquerading ability is a type of *noblesse oblige*. However, Collins crafts Mercy’s story as a personal narrative, and the events are only from her perspective and have no evidentiary support. The audience, then, should question the validity of Mercy’s disclosures and consider what she altered or even left out.

Collins also uses Mercy’s experiences to forge a secret frame of reference for his audience. When Julian first interacts with Mercy-as-Grace and shares his views about

society, he believes he is conversing with a lady who possesses little first-hand knowledge of the disparity between classes. He specifically describes his view of Kensington Gardens, which he found particularly stimulating:

For some time past I have been living in a flat, ugly, barren, agricultural district. You can't think how pleasant I found the picture presented by the Gardens, as a contrast. The ladies in their rich winter dresses, the smart nursery maids, the lovely children, the ever moving crowd skating on the ice of the Round Pond; it was all so exhilarating after what I have been used to... (Collins, *New* 67)

However, Collins's audience knows that Mercy can relate all too well. From her barren vantage point, she found society so alluring that she committed fraud to regain a semblance of her place. And even Julian, despite his radical politics, betrays the lens through which he views society with his adjective use: The agricultural district where he ministers is "flat, ugly, barren" and Kensington is "exhilarating" (67). As a clergyman, Julian has the mobility to inhabit these different regions yet still "come home." As he traverses these spaces, he carries his political ideas with him and shares them, which according to some, like Horace, were disorderly and threatened to upset society's status quo. It is these political views, however, that enable Julian to see beyond social boundaries and envision marrying Mercy once her true identity is known: "I have never been able...to see why we should assert ourselves among other men as belonging to a particular caste, and as being forbidden, in any harmless thing, to do as other people do" (68). Though Julian is speaking particularly about expectations of clergymen, his ideas transcend social position and his love of Mercy persists, even after he learns of her machinations.

Mercy's impersonation of Grace serves to destabilize Mablethorpe House and the family it represents. Lady Janet expresses no qualms about accepting Mercy in the guise of Grace Roseberry, "Your face is your introduction, my dear" (Collins, *New* 45). Her willing and open acceptance of Mercy-as Grace continues even after the real Grace arrives. At times, there are cracks in this acceptance, such as when Lady Janet observes the tension between her adopted daughter and Julian and tells herself that "[Mercy-as-Grace is] to blame; the women always are!" (149). However, even after Mercy confesses, Lady Janet remains one of Mercy's defenders, though perhaps this is made possible because Lady Janet refuses to ever hear Mercy's story and never admits that she was "deceived by an adventuress" (199).

Collins's use of Lady Janet's support of Mercy, during her masquerade as Grace and after her confession, illustrates how easily social position and personal authority are tarnished. The real Grace's interactions with Lady Janet vividly illustrate this effect. Because of Mercy's actions and the older woman's acceptance of them, the proverbial tables of social status have turned, and Grace foregoes a respectful tone when conversing with Lady Janet:

'I begin to understand your ladyship,' [Grace] said. 'You are ashamed to acknowledge that you have been grossly imposed upon. Your only alternative, of course, is to ignore everything that has happened. Pray count on *my* forbearance. I am not at all offended—I am merely amused. It is not every day that a lady of high rank exhibits herself in such a position as yours to an obscure woman like me...' (Collins, *New* 200)

Ironically, Grace's subsequent negotiations with Lady Janet reveal her to be an "adventuress" in her own way, albeit differently from Mercy. She does not agree to leave

England until offered the adequate sum of five hundred pounds, which she takes as a triumph over Lady Janet (205). Though Grace's position in Lady Janet's household was based on a family relationship, the younger woman's attitude and demeanor—her lack of grace—contest the idea that bloodlines dictate character. Instead, the real Grace Roseberry sickens Lady Janet and taints “the very air of the room” (205), while Mercy is a “grand beauty,” who will “fill her ears again with the melody of that gentle voice” (204). Lady Janet recognizes the inversion that has occurred: ““Oh, my love!...how low I have stooped, how miserably I have degraded myself—and all for You!”” (205). Because Lady Janet does not reject Mercy and continues to support her by visiting her in the Refuge, sanctioning her marriage to Julian, and throwing a grand ball for the newly married couple. These actions attract allegations of incompetence. Horace writes in a letter to Grace, “It is a matter of grave anxiety to consider how much longer Lady Janet can be trusted to manage her own affairs. I shall take an opportunity of touching on the matter delicately when I next see her lawyer” (262). The narrative ends without resolving Lady Janet's outcome, though it is a certainty that Horace speaking to her lawyer would further diminish her social authority.

Grace exacerbates the disorder generated by Mercy's actions; she is another “disorderly woman” whom society wants to exclude, and if Mercy had not confessed, Grace would have been sent first to the workhouse and then to the madhouse. Because Grace lacked personal papers proving her identity, her claims were consistently met with suspicion, even by her doctor, who wrote, “Without pronouncing her to be mad...we are nevertheless of opinion that she is suffering under a species of insane delusion” (Collins,

New 79). Grace never acknowledges that Mercy saved her from certain incarceration, and in general, there is little that is graceful about Grace. However, like Mercy, Grace's "vile" behavior derives from her desire to regain her lost place in society. Prior to Mercy's confession, without her identification papers and lacking local character witnesses, Grace is left to use Mercy as a point of resistance. By establishing herself as what Mercy is *not*, even when no one else believes her, Grace asserts her identity. She reminds Mercy, "You have no right to be in this house at all. Remember, if you please, who you are, and who I am" (153) and taunts Horace with the threat that he may "marry an outcast from the streets" (165). Though Grace's identity is publicly restored and the "disorder" she represented ameliorated, the epilogue reveals that in her correspondence with Horace, she draws parallels between herself and the gentlewomen of the Holmcroft family, continuing to use Mercy to define what she is not.

While Mercy could have easily continued her masquerade as Grace, in *choosing* to confess, she manifests agency, something Victorian society denied former prostitutes. Of all people, Mercy understands what Grace has lost, and she elects to "Restore the identity that [she has] stolen" rather than "shut [Grace] up in a madhouse" (Collins, *New* 169). By confessing, Mercy, who consistently shows her awareness and gauge of male interest, also chose to lose Horace—and to gain Julian. When the latter proposes, she declares, "Am I fit to be your wife?...think of the black ingratitude...if I selfishly, cruelly, wickedly, drag you down to the level of a woman like me!" (257). With these words, Mercy assures Julian's devotion, for he contests that "I raise you to *my* level when I make you my wife" (257). Mercy maintains her resolve to not injure Julian's reputation, and

she returns to the Refuge with the Matron, who has come at Mercy's request to fetch her. Mercy's actions throughout this course of the narrative can be read as her continued *choice*. Her interaction with the child, her "sister in adversity," who is accompanying the Matron, underscores the significance of her decision to turn from Julian and to embrace "the rescued waif of the streets as consolation sent from God" (259). Mercy possesses full knowledge of her actions' implications, yet "Hand in hand the two citizens of the Government of God—outcasts of the government of Man—passed slowly...into the night" (259).

Throughout the narrative's multiple locations and dislocations of Mercy, a true relocation never takes place, mimicking the perpetual displacement of the prostitute figure as constructed by Victorian society. Mercy's incongruent characterization speaks to the audience's need for her to be a maligned Angel of the House, rather than a sovereign agent: "Noble, exploited and longing for rehabilitation, she was, in spite of a poverty-stricken background, so well-spoken that she could effortlessly pass for a lady" (Peters 339). As a former prostitute, Mercy represents the unknown and the unknowable. The fear of the unknown permeates *The New Magdalen*; even the plainclothes policeman creates tension: "Everybody shrank inwardly as if a reptile had crawled into the room" (Collins, *New* 166-7). Depicting Mercy as a woman of grace and goodness comforts an audience whose anxieties are already being preyed upon by the narrative's sensationalism. However, the incongruence of "a woman of the streets behaving like a lady" was "intolerable" (Hughes, *Maniac* 43). Thus, the threat of Mercy's

“disorderliness” extends beyond the imagined realms of Mablethorpe into the real world of Victorian society.

While sensation fiction was designed to evoke a crescendo of heightened emotion, including anxiety, the tidy endings of the formula soothed the nerves of an overwrought audience. *The Woman in White*, for instance, ends with the tableau of Walter and Laura Hartright and Marian Holcomb and the married couples’ newborn son. Though the anxieties generated by the text are far from extinguished, the frame of the new family dynamic gives the audience a sense of resolution. *The New Magdalen* resists such an outcome. The serial, volume, and dramatic forms of the narrative all end with the marriage of Julian and Mercy. How they get to this resolution, however, differs.

Both the serial and volume versions include an epilogue consisting of correspondence between Horace and Grace, as well as extracts from Julian Gray’s diary. We never hear from Mercy’s perspective again. Through Horace, we hear of Julian’s resignation from his curacy and his subsequent work in a London Mission that is “notoriously infested by the most desperate and degraded set of wretches in the whole metropolitan population...hardly ever completely free from epidemic disease” (Collins, *New* 265). Julian falls ill during this time and nearly dies; in his delirium, he calls for Mercy, and the local doctor encourages for her to be sent for. After Mercy nurses Julian back to health, she accepts his marriage proposal, and the two are wed and enjoy a holiday at the remote seaside; after a month, they return to London, in spite of Society’s disapproval that awaits. Though Lady Janet throws a ball to celebrate the couple’s marriage and many attend, all young women are left at home. After this slight, Julian

declares that he and his wife shall emigrate to the “New World.” Julian writes, “So closes my connection with my own country... We shall find five hundred adventurers like ourselves when we join the emigrant ship, for whom their native land has no occupation and no home. Gentlemen of the Statistical Department, add two more to the number of social failures produced by England...” (277). With this declaration, the story of Mercy Merrick is at an end, and since readers know that Mercy has already lived abroad and been subject to scandal and innuendo over her history and reputation, we can only assume an uncertain reception for the Grays.

Collins purposefully made significant changes to *The New Magdalen: A Dramatic Story, in a Prologue and Three Acts* to thwart “stealers of plays” (Baker, et. al. 393). In comparison to the serial and volume versions of *The New Magdalen*, the dramatic version has the more contrived ending: Mercy confesses; Horace recoils and exits the stage; and Grace reclaims her identity and exits. Then, Mercy and Lady Janet share a moment of reconciliation onstage, as the former repents and the latter forgives: “My child! I gave you a mother’s love. What is there that a mother’s love cannot forgive?” (Collins, *New Magdalen: A Dramatic Story* 80). The two hug, and Lady Janet exits. With only Mercy and Julian remaining on the stage, they share a touching and romantic exchange. She reminds him of what he will face: “The scorn of every creature you know will strike at you through me” (80-1). But he declares that they will leave England and “find a home among new people, in a new world” (81). Julian places the responsibility of his happiness upon Mercy: “It rests with you and you alone, to make the happiness or the misery of my life” (81). Every resistance Mercy offers, Julian counters, and after, according to stage

directions, he takes Mercy in his arms, he delivers the last line: “What can the world give me in exchange for You?” (81). This romantic declaration touched a chord with audiences, as *The New Magdalen* was one of Collins’s most successful theatre productions. It is also a rather trite ending, ignoring the complications that are at least partially addressed by the epilogue in the serial and volume versions. However, suspension of disbelief works in Collins’s favor with this tidy ending, as it satisfies the audience and smoothes over any lingering fears about the unknown invading the Victorian home. The play suggests that, if an imposter does invade the home, her actions are justified, and she will be of higher moral fiber than many rightfully inhabiting the space.⁴⁰

Regardless of his motivations, Collins’s use of serial, volume, and drama forms broadened his audience base, particularly the percentage that was female because “although it was a subject intimately concerned with women, prostitution was not generally accepted as a woman’s subject” (Sutphin 512). In all its forms, *The New Magdalen* contributes to and is the product of Victorian discourse about contagion anxieties as represented by the prostitute. Understanding the individual through this lens demonstrates how public space was rhetorically constructed according to private action. The narrative reiterates this relationship between space and identity; for instance,

⁴⁰ The dramatized version of *The New Magdalen* exaggerates Grace’s harsher qualities, which heightens its depiction of Mercy as a maligned Angel of the House. However, perhaps Collins did not fully intend for this polarization. In a February 1882 letter to William Winter, Collins wrote about French actress Aimée Desclée who had wanted to play Grace: ‘Develop the character a little more, in the last act,’ she said to me, ‘I will see that the play is thoroughly well translated into French – and I will make Grace, and not Mercy Merrick, the chief woman in the piece. Grace’s dramatic position is magnificent: I feel it, to my fingers’ ends. Wait and see!’ She died poor soul, a few months afterward, and Grace Roseberry will, I fear, never be properly acted now” (Baker and Clarke 444). It is worthwhile to consider how a more complex and dimensional Grace would have impacted audience interpretation of Mercy and the play overall.

unchaperoned females in the streets of a great city after nightfall were prey for “Want” and “Sin” (Collins, *New* 15). As sensation fiction, *The New Magdalen* purposefully taps into the fears of the populace, but the formulaic ending defies easy resolution; though this narrative sees Mercy-as-Grace restore Grace’s identity, it also sees Mercy marry Julian Gray, a clergyman of an established family. She is the unknown, and she has been brought into a space that resists the unknown, one that, per social strictures, is closed to prostitutes. In this way, the narrative exacerbates related anxieties: Identity and social worth cannot always be verified, and spatial boundaries cannot be maintained. The inability to control space and identity and their inherent malleability is explored further in chapter five, which focuses upon selected works by Elizabeth Gaskell.

CHAPTER V

AN INFECTED TRADITION:

WRITING THE PROSTITUTE

...there is now existing a moral pestilence which creeps insidiously into the privacy of the domestic circle, and draws thence the myriads of its victims, and which saps the foundation of that holy confidence, the first, the most beautiful attraction of home.

– William Sanger, *The History of Prostitution* (1859)

And now she saw among her own familiar associates one, almost her housefellow, who had been stained with that evil most repugnant to her womanly modesty, that would fain have ignored its existence altogether... Who was to be trusted more, if Ruth—calm, modest, delicate, dignified Ruth—had a memory blackened by sin?

– Jemima, from Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853)

This dissertation, a study of process and product, has demonstrated how anxieties about contagion influenced what the prostitute represented and how she was used rhetorically, exposing how expectations, functions, and locations define spaces and identities. The extreme example of a “disorderly” female, the prostitute was rhetorically constructed as exemplum and considered a contagion. My study has examined three sites of “infection” as illustrated by the prostitute: physical spaces associated with the presence and operation of prostitutes; the infiltration of presumably “safe” physical spaces with the dangerous prostitute, such as a former prostitute’s assimilation into the domestic sphere; and the assumption that all women located in physical spaces associated with the

presence and operation of prostitutes *were* prostitutes (or susceptible to becoming one).

My investigation of Victorian rhetorics, (the multiple genres making claims about prostitution), connects diverse texts, from newspaper articles to medical treatises to fiction, that exhibit the effects of the shifting cultural conversation about the prostitute and prostitution. A close reading of articles from *The London Times* and *The Daily News*, spanning 1862 to 1864 (and encapsulating the first CDA's passing), reveals that these texts used the prostitute as a literal marker to instigate readers' association(s) with physical place. Acton's 1857 and 1870 treatises on prostitution employ the prostitute as a symbol of disease and dis-ease, and his conflicting positioning of the prostitute as familiar and threatening, as contained and transgressive, undermined his proposals. Wilkie Collins's *The New Magdalen*, across its various forms published in 1872-1873, constructs the character of Mercy Merrick to challenge and complicate audience assumptions about the identity and space(s) of a prostitute; the prostitute is a marker of danger. In contrast to these later works, Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), *Lizzie Leigh* (1850), and *Ruth* (1853) illustrate the author's attempts to grapple with the perception of disorderly women. In *Mary Barton* and *Lizzie Leigh*, the prostitute marks the point of no return, and in *Ruth*, the fallen heroine, who is not a prostitute, still marks the point of no return—it is only through death that she reclaims a semblance of social “place.” For Gaskell, literal and figurative space is inextricably linked with perceptions of self and identity. Juxtaposing these texts exposes how they participate in the constitution of a cultural mapping that used the prostitute figure as a marker, or navigational point, that influenced readers' internalization of knowledge about space and identity.

These Victorian rhetorics also reflect the gendered hierarchies of the society: Newspaper editors, physicians, and bestselling authors—these individuals, whose work contributed to the ethos of their professions, wielded significant social power that could manipulate concepts of space and, thereby, identity. Not surprisingly, these powerful social authorities were typically male, and this privileging of the male gender manifests in chapters two through four, which unintentionally mirror that privileging by focusing on male-authored texts that rhetorically construct the prostitute. While this imbalance in representation of gender is troubling, it is also reflective of the time period: Through the lens of dominant, patriarchal codes, women were identified as “disorderly,” and the prostitute, the least ordered of all, was rendered outside of society and even outside of gender. The prostitute was the epitome of female “disorderliness.”

There were, however, women writers who participated in Victorian discourse about prostitution, and their contributions deserve closer scrutiny. Their works also evidence the influence of contagion anxieties upon the representation and rhetorical construction of the prostitute. These writers, who were often novelists like Elizabeth Gaskell, worked from within the patriarchal system that defined their society, and their writing reflects the compounded influence of that system as compared to the influence upon male writers. These effects are particularly evident in texts that deal with a sexually and politically charged topic like prostitution. For instance, from a modern perspective, it seems that women writers were uniquely situated to textually render the prostitute: They were connected through a kinship of gender and disorderliness, in addition to the author-whore metaphor that persisted in cultural consciousness. Yet, despite these connections,

women writers were also participants (not necessarily by choice) in a system that linked behavior and social expectation. Differences in class and social perception often created a chasm between renderer and subject, and even a writer like Gaskell, who was sympathetic to the prostitute's plight, could not, for various reasons, portray a "happy ending"—other than isolation or death—for her prostitute characters.

The following analysis addresses the works of three women: Frances Burney, Jane Austen, and Gaskell. The obvious commonalities in topoi, plot structure, and intended audience link the works of Burney, Austen, and Gaskell, and when juxtaposed, their work provides a mini-trajectory that illustrates the ways that women writers rhetorically used the prostitute. These authors are often referenced in discussions about theories of the novel, and as with the other texts examined in this dissertation, their work should be studied as both process and product; Nancy Armstrong argues that we should understand through "the historical conditions that women have confronted as writers... [where] history takes place...in and through these areas of culture over which women may have held sway" (*Desire* 8). An examination of the connections among Burney, Austen, and Gaskell expose how they contributed, in different ways, to the cultural conversation about the "disorderly woman" and prostitution.

The publication dates of the works analyzed in this chapter predate the articles printed in *The Times* and *The Daily News*, as well as the works of Acton and Collins. The ways in which those representatives of the patriarchy viewed the prostitute and the subject of prostitution was significantly affected by the public conversation that had developed about the contagions of prostitution. Burney and Austen's work offers insight

into how female writers constructed the disorderly woman during a time when prostitution was not a public conversation, while Gaskell's work, which straddles the years in which public health became an established platform, illustrates a changing view of that disorderly figure. This mini-trajectory of earlier texts also illustrates the pervasive and entrenched conflation of the terms "fallen woman" and "prostitute." Though these terms were still conflated later in the nineteenth-century, when Acton and Collins and others were writing, the ways in which these states of disorderly female behavior were envisioned, conflated, and (re)produced by women writers earlier in the century (in the late eighteenth century for Burney) are extremely problematic and deserve more attention than can be given in these pages.

For example, as discussed in chapter one, Burney's *Evelina* (1778) communicates social anxieties about the contagion as illustrated by the threat of prostitution and female fallenness. The novel clearly links immorality and immoral behavior with the dark alleys of Vauxhall Gardens. This association, internalized by the reader during the reading process, affects perceptions of space and identity: Which females are located in the dark alleys of Vauxhall Gardens? What defines them as belonging to the Gardens? And what behaviors do they engage in while within that space? These questions, raised by Burney's portrayal of Evelina's near-loss of respectability and near-fall into the status of disorderly individual, speak to the novel of manners tradition. Burney's work is often compared to Austen's, which follows the same tradition, while Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, *Lizzie Leigh*, and *Ruth* perpetuates a modified form of domestic fiction.

Austen's work, known for its careful prose and "drawing room" settings, reflects the influence of social anxieties about the contagion of prostitution. The effect of such social concerns, and in Austen's witty hands, their potential for gossip, can be seen in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813): When the news spreads of the Wickhams' marriage, the narrator comments wryly, "To be sure it would have been more for the advantage of conversation, had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world in some distant farm house. But there was much to be talked of, in marrying her..." (315-6). Austen's reference to prostitution, though subtle, is important: The idea of Lydia becoming a prostitute would indeed have set the neighborhood tongues wagging, and her ruin would have infected the entire Bennet family, as it very nearly did. Lydia's affair with Wickham rightly propels a significant portion of *Pride and Prejudice*'s plot as able relatives race to right the damage her disorderly behavior has wrought upon the family's character and to contain the threat of "contagion."

While Lydia's situation is righted, and she secures her social position as Wickham's wife, Austen revisits the seclusion alternative in *Mansfield Park* (1814): Mrs. Maria Rushworth née Bertram leaves her boorish husband for the rakish Henry Crawford, and then finds herself divorced by the former and abandoned by the latter. The narrator observes that the former Mrs. Rushworth's situation was "a retirement and reproach which could allow no second spring of hope or character" (405). Accordingly, Mr. Bertram relegates his disorderly daughter to a permanent retirement from society in a

“remote and private” home in another country (405). Within Austen’s world, permanent retirement was a happy ending, considering the alternative.

Of Austen’s oeuvre, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) provides perhaps the most direct discussion about prostitution, though her “fallen women” are, significantly, only background characters. Colonel Brandon confides to Elinor Dashwood the story of his lost love, who was married to his older brother in an exercise of endogamy and economy. The denied lovers planned to elope to Scotland but were discovered, and the retribution for their actions was severe. The Colonel wound up in service abroad, leaving his love in a miserable marriage, and she, like Maria Rushworth, rejected social order and scandalously left her husband and was divorced. By the time the Colonel returned to England and found her, she was living “a life of sin” and dying of consumption (Austen, *Sense* 195). He made arrangements for her care and promised to take care of her daughter, Eliza; however, his ward inherits her mother’s penchant for disorderly behavior. Years later, Eliza is seduced by Willoughby, who abandons the now-pregnant young girl. Brandon finds her, she delivers, and he removes mother and child to the country, “where she remains” (199). As a fallen woman, Eliza loses whatever social position she might have enjoyed as Brandon’s ward. Austen uses the intertwined stories of Eliza and her mother as a narrative device, offering a parallel to Marianne’s situation and heightening the reader’s anxiety about her fate.

In all three of these novels, Austen employs portrayals of material space to contain and control the disorderly female. Young women who engage in sexually charged behavior leave their contained domestic centers for locations like barracks towns or

Scotland's famous Gretna Green. In their controlled, orderly home environments, these behaviors could not take place, but in these unsupervised locations, the couples can act at will. The actions that take place in these non-domestic spaces forever alter the identities of the young women, marking them as unable to re-enter their former societies without the protection of marriage. Wickham's forced marriage to Lydia Bennet restores her position, but Maria, Eliza's mother, and Eliza herself are not so lucky. Unable—or unfit, as most would deem—to return to their former social centers, their options are seclusion or death. These novels rhetorically construct the disorderly woman as a threat: She marks the dangerous areas and behaviors to avoid if social positions are to remain secure.

Like Burney and Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell grappled with society's treatment of women who exhibited sexual "excess." Whether read as a proto-feminist or a social conservative or both, Gaskell interrogates the dynamics of relationship in multiple spheres and diverse situations through her work. Scholars note her complexity, which affected her representation of power: "Even in her own day, and even to herself, Gaskell was a combination of seemingly opposing attributes" (Matus 3). For instance, though the prostitute figures prominently in several of her works, Gaskell, like the Victorian society of which she was a part, can never quite work out prostitution's conundrum: "In the mid-Victorian period, medico-moral narratives of sexually transgressive women reified the eighteenth-century Hogarthian narrative of the 'harlot's progress': seduced, pregnant, abandoned, prostituted, and dead" (Eberle 137). Alan Shelston posits in his introduction to *Ruth*, "If Mrs. Gaskell burdens her heroine with guilt it is because she, unlike [Thomas] Hardy, has absolutely no doubt that what she did, whatever the circumstances,

was wrong” (xv). Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Gaskell’s depictions of prostitutes work within socially-prescribed parameters: There is no true “escape” from a life of prostitution except seclusion from society or physical death.

I now turn to Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), *Lizzie Leigh* (1850), and *Ruth* (1853), with an eye to discerning what the prostitute represented and how she was used rhetorically. When juxtaposed, these three texts illustrate three different ways in which texts spatially rendered, and thus identified, “disorderly women.” Gaskell’s narratives (re)iterate cultural beliefs engrained in Victorian discourse about prostitution, denying prostitutes the ability to transcend socially assigned spaces and identities: Her prostitute characters identify the point of no return for readers. For *Mary Barton*’s Esther, there is no recourse but death, and Lizzie, though rescued from the streets, lives out her life in mourning and isolation. Only Ruth is able to attain social absolution; significantly, however, Ruth is termed a “fallen woman,” never a “prostitute.” Portraying Ruth as a victim to a moral misstep enables Gaskell to center the narrative on the character’s life-long journey to achieve redemption in the eyes of society, which Ruth accomplishes, though at the cost of her life. After her death, Ruth reclaims a “place” in society, a place that I hesitate to call “hers” because it is not the place she would have inhabited had her misstep never occurred. In contrast, because they are prostitutes, Esther and Lizzie have lost their “respectable” places in society. Once lost, according to Victorian social strictures, social place could rarely be regained.

Gaskell’s works often emphasize the significance of geographical location. *Mary Barton* and *Lizzie Leigh* invoke Manchester as a primary setting. These textual

representations of Manchester constitute “phenomenological geography.” Readers unfamiliar with the area employ the narrative in forming their interpretation of the geographic space. Gaskell’s narratives capture multiple aspects of Manchester life, from the working conditions of factory employees to the living conditions of their families. According to *Mary Barton* and *Lizzie Leigh*, Manchester is a bustling city, one whose streets, after dark, are populated by shadowy and disreputable characters, including prostitutes. As depicted by Gaskell, Manchester prostitutes live on the edges of society, using drink and other vice to dull the pain of their miserable existences. It is significant that *Ruth*, the only narrative of the three that allows any true resolution for its sexually disorderly female character, is not located in a concrete geographic location. This suggests that the realism of using Manchester as a place-name with which readers could directly associate would have fostered contagion anxieties and disallowed the opportunity for a fallen woman’s redemption, as depicted in *Ruth*—audience disbelief could not be suspended that far.

In *Mary Barton*, published anonymously in 1848, Gaskell gives us Esther, whose personal story serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of working and being in the streets after dark. Esther and her sister Mary were from Buckinghamshire, and John Barton described them as different from Manchester women: “You’ll not see among the Manchester wenches such fresh rosy cheeks, or such black lashes to grey eyes (making them look like black)...I never seed two such pretty women for sisters; never” (Gaskell, *Mary* 9). Mary, older than Esther, married John Barton, and the younger woman lived with them until John chastised her behavior, after which she took lodgings. Esther’s

beauty was considered “a sad snare” (9). John attests, “Here was Esther so puffed up, that there was no holding her in. Her spirit was always up” (9). He warned his errant sister-in-law that spending her money, earned from factory work, on dresses and staying out late at night would come to no good end: ““Esther, I see what you’ll end at with your artificials, and your fly-away veils, and stopping out when honest women are in their beds; you’ll be a street-walker, Esther, and then, don’t you go to think I’ll have you darken my door, though my wife is your sister”” (9). Gaskell uses this declaration by the family patriarch to mimic society’s treatment of “dishonest” prostitutes; such beliefs manifested as imagined yet impervious boundaries for many.

Unbeknownst to her family, Esther arranges to go with her lover, a soldier, to Chester. They were together for three years and had a child, and though he had promised marriage, the ceremony never happened. Then, he was ordered to Ireland, and told Esther he must leave her and their daughter behind. He gave her fifty pounds, but she was on her own. She mishandled the money at first, but opened a “small-ware shop” and thought all would be well until her daughter fell ill (Gaskell, *Mary* 161). She sold everything to get money for food and medicine. When telling her story to Jem, Esther remembers, “it was winter, cold bleak winter; and my child was so ill, so ill, and I was starving. And I could not bear to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together; - oh, her moans, her moans, which money could give the means of relieving! So, I went out into the street one January night” (161-2). With this action, Esther truly loses her place in the world, and her sacrifice does not save her daughter’s life.

Following her child's death, Esther returns to Manchester and continues to walk the streets. Gaskell portrays Esther as a transitory figure who exhibits flâneuse qualities that enable her to observe and to make sense of those observations. For instance, because she investigates the scene of Crawford's murder herself, she discovers the tell-tale piece of paper that proves Jem's innocence and John's guilt. Esther cannot transgress the imagined boundaries between the streets and the domestic sphere she once shared with her family, though. Instead, she watched and listened: "I put this and that together, and followed one, and listened to another; many's the time I've watched the policeman off his beat, and pepped through the chink of the window-shutter to see the old room, and sometimes Mary or her father sitting up late for some reason..." (Gaskell, *Mary* 162). These voyeuristic actions give Esther a power that her lack of social position denies: She is the one with access to knowledge of public events, as the torn paper shows.

Esther has internalized society's view of prostitutes and reflected it back upon herself: She sees herself as "the abandoned and polluted outcast" (Gaskell, *Mary* 235). Jem asks her to "Come home," but Esther replies,

I tell you, I cannot. I could not lead a virtuous life if I would. I should only disgrace you. If you will know all...I must have drink. Such as live like me could not bear life if they did not drink. It's the only thing to keep us from suicide. If we did not drink, we could not stand the memory of what we have been, and the thought of what we are. (164)

This passage shows the conflicted state in which Esther and others like her live: They make up a community, as evidenced by Esther's use of plural first person, yet they are not part of society proper. They are also infected with a level of degeneration that, in the

way of self-fulfilling prophecy, prevents them from reforming and re-assimilating.

Prostitution, as represented by Esther, is a harsh state from which there is no return.

Esther, however, can “pass,” within limits, at least. In order to take Mary the discovered scrap of paper, she borrows clothes that were “befitting the wife of a working-man, a black silk bonnet, a printed gown, a plaid shawl, dirty and rather worn to be sure, but which had a sort of sanctity to the eyes of the street-walker, as being the appropriate garb of that happy class to which she could never, never more belong” (Gaskell, *Mary* 236). Ironically, her “character for honesty” enables her procurement of the borrowed clothes (236). In this costume, Esther acts the role of a comfortable working man’s wife, and speaks with bravado of having plenty to eat and not wanting anything, in an attempt to present herself as anything but a prostitute. The narrator acknowledges that Esther perhaps “over-acted her part, for certainly Mary felt a kind of repugnance to the changed and altered aunt” (237). Mary is alone, and she allows Esther in, even calling her “mother” and falling into her aunt’s arms at first sight. Because Mary does not know her aunt to be a prostitute, for a few moments, at least, Esther can once again be “Aunt Hetty.” When they say goodbye, though, Esther physically repels her niece with a push and a declaration: “Not me. You must never kiss me. You!” (242).

In the novel, both Esther and Jem describe her as one without a home. Esther clarifies, “Decent, good people have homes. We have none” (Gaskell, *Mary* 164). And when Jem explains Esther’s situation to Mary, he does so by distinguishing her lack of a domestic center: ““Your poor aunt Esther has no home: -- she’s one of them miserable creatures that walk the streets”” (389-90). Mary’s shock at the news is short-lived,

though, and unlike Jem, who could not think of a way to help Esther, Mary can imagine something beyond and suggests that her aunt emigrate with them to America, where Esther can become “good” (390). To that end, they search and make inquiries, but Esther cannot be found. They do discover her alias, “Butterfly,” and that she is known to be dying. One evening, shortly before leaving the country, they notice “a white face pressed against the panes on the outside, gazing intently into the dusky chamber” (391). They see the pale figure collapse and run outside, there “lay the poor crushed Butterfly – the once innocent Esther” (392). They bring her into the home where she once lived and place her onto Mary’s bed; she dies within hours. Esther never hears of the America plan, and though she comes full circle, she dies without a place of her own. And her anonymity continues after death: Esther was placed with John Barton in a grave marked only with a bible verse—no names, no dates, and no records of identity.

Unlike Esther, Lizzie does escape from the streets. The novella’s title, *Lizzie Leigh*, suggests the character’s centrality, and Lizzie’s actions are indeed the catalyst for the narrative’s action. However, Gaskell never gives Lizzie “voice”; instead, the story is told through the third person perspective of Lizzie’s mother, Anna Leigh, and Lizzie’s foil, Susan Palmer. Lizzie’s actions are related through the stories of these other characters: While in service in Manchester, Lizzie’s employers discovered her pregnancy out-of-wedlock, and she was summarily dismissed. The narrative never clarifies if Lizzie had engaged in consensual sexual activity or not. Turned away from the workhouse because “she were strong... and young enough to work,” Lizzie winds up in the streets (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 12).

The story begins with the death of Lizzie's father, James Leigh, who had excluded his daughter from her family home. This exclusion can be interpreted as a protective move intended to prevent the spread of her "disease," that is, her immoral behavior. In this patriarchal space, females who crossed the imagined boundaries of public (male) and private (female) were considered disorderly and dangerous, and as an immoral, sexually disordered woman fallen into prostitution, Lizzie fulfills both of these criteria. By keeping Lizzie "out," the domestic space is defined: It is not a place for sexual laxity or illegitimate children—it is a place of order and morality. For example, in the moments after James's death, the household carries on as Lizzie's siblings arrange the "house-place" and prepare the tea (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 2). Still operating under the strictures laid out and enforced by their father, there is no place for the disorder that Lizzie represents in this world. Lizzie's mother, Anne, accepted her husband's ruling, "for he was truly the interpreter, who stood between God and [his wife]" (1). Only after James, on his deathbed, forgives his daughter does Anne determine to go and search for her. With the patriarch's forgiveness and blessing, Anne can imagine through and beyond the fields and moors that lay between the Leighs' village and Manchester; they no longer constitute impassable terrain.

Once situated in Manchester with her two sons, Will and Tom, Anne regularly wanders the streets looking for her "lost one" (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 8). In her searching, Anne regularly transgresses spaces, seemingly moving freely between domestic and public realms. And while our unknown narrator, in the single moment of first-person interjection, divulges that because Anne would look into passersby's faces and ask if they

knew a Lizzie Leigh, “I think they believed her to be crazy” (8), Anne was socially secure and not a figure of disorder. While Anne’s search will provide resolution for Lizzie (and the reader), she does not expect Lizzie’s reclamation. Instead, she exclaims to Susan, “Oh, if we could but find her! I’d take her in my arms, and we’d just lie down and die together” (18). Susan, however, sees some hope and reminds Anne, “she may turn right at last. Mary Magdalen did you know” (18). Susan’s hopefulness allows her to see beyond society’s narrative for prostitutes and enables her relationship with Will Leigh, who sees his sister as a contagion of moral and social degeneration and believes Susan will reject him before joining such a tainted family. Susan’s forgiveness of Lizzie, combined with Anne’s, enables Will’s.

As a foil, Susan emphasizes Lizzie’s “deficiencies.” Though the young women’s workplaces were next door to each other, Susan resisted the temptations of service life. Though Lizzie is able to hand her baby to Susan in the middle of a darkened street and disappear, Susan bonds so strongly with Nanny after only a night that she cannot part with the child. Though Lizzie can find no recourse besides the streets, Susan opens a school within the home she maintains for herself and her father. By becoming a teacher, Susan no longer has to “go out” to work, ensuring that she is no longer susceptible to the dangers of working girls traversing the streets at all hours.

As a child of the streets and of a home (albeit a quasi-public home that functions as a part-time day school), Nanny forges the link between Susan and Lizzie that enables the latter’s reclamation. When Nanny awakens “left alone, in the vast mysterious darkness, which had no bounds and seemed infinite,” the narrative might be describing

Lizzie's situation as perceived by society. Victorian readers of *Lizzie Leigh* would have understood that for women like Susan and Anne, Lizzie's world could not be described, let alone understood. Nanny's moments before death, her reason for seeking the light, proffers a means of symbolically connecting the worlds. After the little girl gets out of bed to find "Susy and safety" in the light below, she falls down the stairs, fatally injuring herself. This crisis creates a moment of chaos where Susan and Lizzie inhabit the streets at the same time, with Susan running "down the quiet resounding street" to the doctor's and a shadow—Lizzie—following her. The shadow asks Susan, "Is it my child that lies a-dying?" In an odd, contrived narrative moment, Susan responds with an invitation: "It is a little child of two years old. I do not know whose it is; I love it as my own. Come with me, whoever you are; come with me" (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 23). It makes little sense for Susan to not realize that she is speaking to Lizzie or for her to invite a shadowy stranger lurking in the street in the middle of the night into her home.

Throughout the narrative, Gaskell presents Susan's home as a space of intercession, where she bargained with her father to keep Nanny, and where Anne bargains with Lizzie. "The pure and holy," as the narrator labels her, Susan is depicted as negotiating a space of consideration and generosity. In the crisis moments following Nanny's accident, Susan carries a light up the stairs, with the shadow (Lizzie) following her. In this home, where Nanny has resided, a confrontation occurs between the foils: "[Lizzie] looked so fierce, so mad, so haggard, that, for an instant, Susan was terrified; the next, the holy God had put courage into her heart, and her pure arms were round that guilty, wretched creature...But she was thrown off with violence" (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 24).

Lizzie is violent in her grief, to the point of insensibility. Again, the narrative depicts Susan as the “Angel of the House,” repressing her grief and dealing with the matters at hand: conversing with the doctor about care for the distraught mother and making funeral arrangements.

In the chaotic moments following Nanny’s death, disorder reigns. Lizzie is finally able to be with her daughter—because the child is dead and insensible to the mother’s wickedness. Dressed in Susan’s clothes and lying in her bed, Lizzie mothers Nanny’s corpse as if the child were alive, “smiling, and stroking the little face, murmuring soft, tender words” (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 25). Susan, the epitome of order and sensibility, views Lizzie’s postmortem actions as evidence of an ensuing madness. The doctor sedates Lizzie and instructs that the corpse be taken away from her. Lizzie sleeps in Susan’s bed in the dark, with Nanny’s corpse laid out in the room. When Anne comes to see her lost daughter and dead granddaughter, she sits with Lizzie, feeding and caring for her. In effect, in this room, Lizzie is reborn, spiritually and socially. Anne assures her of salvation if she’ll strive for it and promises to ignore Lizzie’s sordid past and bring her back home. Anne sees Nanny as Lizzie’s spiritual intercessor too, telling her “if it’s gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for thee. Nay, don’t sob a that ‘as thou shalt have it again in heaven; I know thou’lt strive to get there, for thy little Nanny’s sake” (30).

The narrative blatantly calls Nanny “the unconscious sacrifice, whose early calling-home had reclaimed her poor wandering mother,” and with Nanny’s funeral, the narrative returns to Upclose Farm. It remains a space that rejects one from the streets, even an innocent like Nanny: “They dared not lay her by the stern grandfather in Milne

Row churchyard, but they bore her to a lone moorland graveyard, where, long ago, the Quakers used to bury their dead” (Gaskell, *Lizzie* 31). Will and Susan inhabit Upclose Farm, while Anne and Lizzie “dwell in a cottage so secluded that, until you drop into the very hollow where it is placed, you do not see it” (31). From this location, Lizzie works as an angel of mercy, “who comes out of her seclusion whenever there is a shadow in any household” and though many praise her, “she prays always and ever for forgiveness—such forgiveness as may enable her to see her child once more” (32). And the final scene creates a doubling: Susan and Will’s daughters, named Nanny and Lizzie, frolic in the sunshine and flowers while the elder Lizzie sits by the grave of her dead Nanny, weeping “bitterly.”

As is common in nineteenth-century discourse about fallenness, Gaskell’s narrative suppresses Lizzie’s agency. The fact that Lizzie *chose* to enter the workhouse rather than plead with her father is not recognized, nor is it acknowledged that Lizzie gave Nanny away rather than consign her daughter to a life of want and uncertainty. While Lizzie was faced with what are near-impossible choices, she does, in fact, make choices. For instance, she threatened suicide rather than have anyone inform her family of her predicament. Though her father eventually disowned her, Lizzie instigated the separation in an attempt to protect her family and avoid dealing with their disappointment and anger firsthand. Yet Lizzie’s portrayal is not active or dynamic; she is a passive character. In denying her perspective and her voice, the narrative suggests that both are inconsequential and that the *appearance* of her reclamation is most important.

Like Collins's *The New Magdalen* and Acton's theories about the transitory nature of prostitution, the narrative arc of *Lizzie Leigh* speaks to the social anxieties surrounding prostitutes' ability to transgress the imagined boundaries between domestic and public spaces. Gaskell's insistence that Lizzie is reformed and seeking redemption might mollify some anxiety that her movement between spaces evokes. Yet for many readers, the knowledge that Lizzie's story is not an isolated event emphasizes the dangerous state that is being a prostitute—and a single misstep can lead to that miserable life beyond society's bounds. And though Anne "reclaims" her daughter, Lizzie's life is lived in seclusion and perpetual mourning. She cannot achieve her "lost place."

Like Mercy and Lizzie, Ruth also loses her place. However, Ruth is a "fallen" woman, which Victorian social discourse conflated with the identity "prostitute."⁴¹ The terms and phrases used to describe Ruth's situation post-fall echoes those used in describing known prostitutes, like Esther or Mercy: wanton, infectious, contagion, sinner, entrapper of vice, and so on. These adjectives were applied to Ruth after her sexual relationship with Bellingham became public knowledge. This behavior marked her as "disorderly," and she was castigated accordingly. In society's eyes, her identity as a whole hinges upon this one point. For example, even after serving as nursery governess in the Bradshaw home for years, when Mr. Bradshaw confronts Ruth with his knowledge of her past, he addresses her as a vile corruptor, rather than as the woman whose personal economy and demure nature earned his interest and approval from the very beginning. He proclaims to his daughter Jemima, who witnesses the confrontation:

⁴¹ See Page 23, Footnote 10, for more on the conflation of "fallen" and "prostitute."

She has come amongst us with her innocent seeming, and spread her nets well and skillfully. She has turned right into wrong, and wrong into right, and taught you all to be uncertain whether there be any such thing as Vice in the world, or whether it ought not to be looked upon as virtue. She has led you to the brink of the deep pit, ready for the first chance circumstance to push you in. (Gaskell, *Ruth* 339)

Bradshaw sees Ruth's "disorderliness" as a threat to the order of his own home and to the identities of his daughters: As part of the contingent of Victorian fallen women, Ruth threatens to destabilize the female body, which would in turn destabilize the social body. And though the novel's trajectory ameliorates any fear of infection that a woman like Ruth might elicit, in doing so, the narrative stresses the instability of socio-economic situation, the insecurity of maintaining "a character," and fears about transgressors of space.

This trajectory can be charted through an analysis of spaces invoked in the novel, locations that foster the reader's internalizations about social connections between place and identity. Gaskell's emphasis upon her portrayals of material space is seen in the novel's opening pages, which extensively describe the history of the town's architecture and geography. Our unknown narrator, rather than our heroine, voices these pages, establishing that while this novel is addressing a taboo subject, it is not allowing the fallen woman to share her own story, so though Gaskell sparked controversy with the publication of this novel, she continued to adhere to certain social constraints.

In *Ruth*, space is commodity and, as such, bows to the whims of the economy. Quite frankly, it all comes down to money—or, rather, the lack of it. The Hilton family's lack of money leads to Ruth being apprenticed to Mrs. Mason's millinery shop; Ruth's

inability to pay for tea at the inn leads to her not slipping out and running back to Milham Grange, which leads to her life with Mr. Bellingham; the Bensons' frugality and sacrifice are cited as the reasons they can house Ruth and Leonard; and Ruth's desire to contribute to the household, after Mr. Bradshaw dismisses her, leads to her becoming a nurse; and Ruth's nursing leads to her death. The novel suggests that this vicious cycle needs to be stopped, though it offers no interventions for doing so. In its depictions of space as transformative, though, it also suggests that our conceptualizations of identity are informed by these spatial constraints. Seeing beyond these boundaries, perhaps, is the resolution, though even the novel cannot accomplish this feat.

According to *Ruth*, which opens with a lengthy description of the conversion of the domestic centers of "such of the county-families as contented themselves with the gaieties of a provincial town" into public sites, space transforms according to economic whim (Gaskell 1). During the heyday of the county-families' temporary habitation, these town residences "crowded the streets," and their upper floors projected over the streets below. These disproportionate mansions, which represented safety, security, and status to their inhabitants created danger for the middle and lower classes traversing the streets below with streets that lacked lampposts and "were dark, and ill-paved with large, round, jolting pebbles, and with no side-path protected by kerb-stones" (1). The narrator states that these dangers were of no consequence to the county-families, as they either had coaches or "were carried by their own men in their own sedans into the very halls of their friends" (1). The best of these homes are cast as literal beacons of light: "the only light was derived from the glaring, flaring oil-lamps hung above the doors of the more

aristocratic mansions” (2). But these beacons are selective and limiting, as the light allowed “space for the passers-by to become visible, before they again disappeared into the darkness, where it was no uncommon thing for robbers to be in waiting for their prey” (2). This passage foreshadows what happens to Ruth: Because the young girl was beautiful, Mrs. Mason brings her to the ball, where Ruth meets Mr. Bellingham—and once he sees her (in the “light,” so to speak), he then lies in wait for her.

The picturesque town, decorated by these “grand old houses,” loses its temporary inhabitants, which leads to others (who followed those in the grand old houses) giving up their residences there as well. Because of these economic shifts, the houses remain vacant, until “speculators ventured to purchase, and to turn the deserted mansions into many smaller dwellings, fitted for professional men, or even...into shops!” (Gaskell, *Ruth* 2-3). The houses required extensive renovations to be profitable to its new inhabitants: “The shopkeepers found out that the once fashionable street was dark, and that the dingy light did not show off their goods to advantage; the surgeon could not see to draw his patient’s teeth; the lawyer had to ring for candles an hour earlier than he was accustomed to do when living in a more plebian street” (3). The houses were then rebuilt in a Georgian style, though now quartered into shops, and Gaskell exposes space’s palimpsestic nature through their depictions: “people were occasionally surprised, after passing through a commonplace-looking shop, to find themselves at the foot of a grand carved oaken staircase, lighted by a window of stained glass, storied all over with armorial bearings” (3). Mrs. Mason’s workroom is located at the top of one of these random staircases.

In this shifting locale stands Ruth, to whom we are introduced on page five, with her forehead pressed against a window looking out at the snow-covered town. Ruth has been shifted herself, taken suddenly from Milham Grange and deposited at Mrs. Mason's, where she is to practice self-reliance and economy. The shop and its workrooms are located in a former "grand old house," but it is no longer a domestic centre. Instead, it is a millinery shop where Ruth is working far into the night, and she longs to "sally forth and enjoy the glory" of the night (Gaskell, *Ruth* 5). However, her apprenticeship to Mrs. Mason, and her enforced position in the industrial realm prevents her from acting upon her own impulse.

The workroom is a partitioned-off area within a former grand drawing room. Ruth has "instinctively" chosen the coldest and darkest spot solely because of its facing wall:

[on this wall] was a remnant of the beauty of the old drawing-room, which must once have been magnificent, to judge from the faded specimen left. It was divided into panels of pale sea-green, picked out with white and gold; and on these panels were painted—were thrown with the careless, triumphant hand of a master—the most lovely wreaths of flowers, profuse and luxuriant beyond description, and so real-looking, that you could almost fancy you smelt their fragrance, and heard the south wind go softly rustling in and out among the crimson roses... (Gaskell, *Ruth* 6)

Ruth's choice signifies two things: one, she is drawn to representations of nature as it is within the pastoral, rural realm that she is most comfortable; and two, Ruth is like the workroom—a site transformed against her will because of economic necessity.

Economic incentive drives the transformation of material spaces throughout the novel. The benefits of social status and financial backing are particularly evident in the character of Mr. Bellingham, who has the ability to transform and transgress space easily.

When he and Ruth travel through Alpine country, he insists that the inn's proprietress, Jenny Morgan, move her lodgers and furniture around so that they can stay in the main building; his financial security ensures that Mrs. Morgan will meet his demands: "The remembrance of his former good payment prompted many little lies...before [Mrs. Morgan] succeeded in turning out a gentleman and lady, who were only planning to remain till the ensuing Saturday at the outside, so, if they did fulfil their threat, and leave on the next day, she would be no very great loser" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 64). Though Ruth sees the re-arrangements as "unfair," she desists in making her point when Mr. Bellingham makes his displeasure at her ideas known: He has the power, and Ruth complies.

We again see economic power in action when Mr. Bradshaw transforms his family's home in anticipation of Mr. Donne (aka Mr. Bellingham)'s visit as the Dissenter party's candidate for representative of Ecclestone. Not only is Ruth, then working as the Bradshaws' nursery governess, excluded from this realm, but so are the younger girls in her charge. Donne's "languid, high-bred manner" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 262) distinguishes him from everyone else that Mr. Bradshaw knows, and it also prevents him from noticing the extreme measures that his coming wrought. The renovations included breaking down "The partition wall between the unused drawing-room and the school-room...in order to admit of folding doors," and a bathroom was converted into a bedroom with a curtain hiding the shower bath" (253). Even staff was shifted, and "the professional cook of the town" temporarily employed (253). Representations of material space incur associations with the "type(s)" of individuals who inhabit them. In *Ruth*, the realm of the upper classes is portrayed as care-free, awash in beauty and beautiful things, thoughtless, and

frivolous; those who inhabit this world understand its machinations, but for those outside, there is danger. The spatial rhetorics at play in *Ruth* reinforce a regulation of space, of who belongs where.

Ruth's ignorance is often referenced in the narrative; her inability to discern urban realities leads to her situation. The scene of the ballroom of "the noble shire-hall" foreshadows her downfall. When Ruth and the other chosen seamstresses enter the dim room, before the ball has begun, they are in awe of its "old magnificence." The room does not suggest innocence and light, though. In fact, the musicians' "voices sounded goblin-like in their dark recess, where candles were carried about in an uncertain wavering manner, reminding Ruth of the flickering zigzag motion of the will-o'-the-wisp" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 13). When all of the lights are lit, and this dangerous mystery dissipates, the room loses some of its appeal for Ruth: "Suddenly the room sprang into the full blaze of light, and Ruth felt less impressed with its appearance, and more willing to obey Mrs. Mason's sharp summons to her wandering flock, than she had been when it was dim and mysterious" (13). We now know that Ruth is attracted to the unknown and mysterious, even in rather scary form. However, this attraction is never fully developed in the narrative, which continues to emphasize her lack of knowledge and guile rather than any true fascination.

The separation between the worlds of those dancing in the ballroom and those facilitating the dancing is distinct. During the dances, the seamstresses were allowed to stand at a side door and watch. As the events on the dance floor unfolded, Ruth looked on at a world of which she was not a part. Unlike her peers, she prefers to ignore the

participants' individuality and names, instead lumping them all together: "Ruth did not care to separate the figures that formed a joyous and brilliant whole; it was enough to gaze, and dream of the happy smoothness of the lives in which such music, and such profusion of flowers, of jewels, elegance of every description, and beauty of all shapes and hues, were everyday things" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 14). To avoid becoming overly familiar with the scene and learning more than she wants, Ruth returns to the ante-room. The next young lady, Miss Duncombe, who requires her help happens to be Mr. Bellingham's dance partner and rumored fiancée. This encounter illustrates social dynamics at play as the young lady, whether in an exertion of feminine wiles and helplessness or in response to a true social issue, tells Bellingham, "I dare not enter that room [where Ruth is working] by myself" (15). This exchange further betrays the social awareness of how those within a space and their functions impacted the behaviors of individuals associated with other spaces.

The acknowledged difference between social spheres is emphasized throughout *Ruth*. After the ball, Ruth and her fellow workers, along with Mrs. Mason, walk home in dawn's light. "The lamps were extinguished, yet the shutters of the shops and dwelling-houses were not opened. All sounds had an echo unheard by day. One or two houseless beggars sat on doorsteps, and, shivering, slept, with heads bowed on their knees, or resting against the cold hard support afforded by the wall" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 17). This reality is sharply different from the surreal nature of the dance, and Ruth feels "as if a dream had melted away." We also see in this passage how it is the tension between spaces that enforces difference; just as Miss Duncombe didn't see Ruth's individuality, neither does

the latter see the former's. In fact, Ruth likens the dancers (except for Mr. Bellingham, who gave her a flower) to another "race of beings" (17). The dichotomy between the two spheres is harshly drawn:

Here was cold, biting mid-winter for [Ruth], and such as her—for those poor beggars almost a season of death; but to Miss Duncombe and her companions, a happy, merry time, when flowers still bloomed, and fires crackled, and comforts and luxuries were piled around them like fairy gifts. What did they know of the meaning of the word, so terrific to the poor? What was winter to them? (17)

Ruth can see the distinctions between the world of privilege and the world assigned to her by circumstance. However, she lacks the social knowledge to understand the precise machinations of these clashing spheres.

In contrast, characters like Jenny Morgan, the inn proprietress, observe and participate in the public sphere enough to understand its machinations. For instance, she recognizes immediately the relationship between Ruth and Mr. Bellingham: "'she's not his wife,' thought Jenny, 'that's clear as day. His wife would have brought her maid, and given herself twice as many airs about the sitting rooms; while this poor miss never spoke, but kept still as a mouse'" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 64). So long as the parents of such "young men" have nothing to say, though, Jenny believes "it's none of my business to go about asking questions" (64). At the time, it is in Jenny's financial interests to stay quiet. However, after Bellingham falls ill and his infamous mother arrives, threatening to malign the inn's reputation for allowing the situation, Jenny relocates Ruth to a back room, sends her meals to her room, and tells her to use the side door so that other patrons

won't see her; Ruth obligingly keeps herself "close prisoner in the room to which Mrs. Morgan accorded her" (87).

The reactions to Ruth's naïveté are, at times, hard to believe, and they consist of both violence and Christian charity. At one point, a young boy hits Ruth in the face to thwart her attempt to kiss his infant sibling, renouncing her and defending his actions by saying, "'She's a naughty girl—mamma said so, she did; and she shan't kiss our baby...I heard you [their nurse] say [she was naughty] yourself. Go away, naughty woman'" (Gaskell, *Ruth* 71). Jenny, though protective of her business, recognizes that Ruth lacks awareness. As she tells the doctor attending Bellingham, "[Ruth's] an innocent, inoffensive young creature. I always think it right, for my own morals, to put a little scorn into my manners when such as her come to stay here; but, indeed, she's so gentle, I've found I hard work to show the proper contempt" (78). These are the qualities that Thurston Benson also recognized, as did his sister, Faith and their housekeeper, Sally.

The Benson home, the "chapel-house," creates a sharp contrast to the other material spaces depicted in the novel as dependent upon economic influences, like the "grand old houses" and Mrs. Mason's millinery: "In the Bensons' house there was the same unconsciousness of individual merit, the same absence of introspection and analysis of motive, as there had been in her mother; but it seemed that their lives were pure and good, not merely from a lovely and beautiful nature, but from some law, the obedience to which was, of itself, harmonious peace, and which governed them almost implicitly..." (Gaskell, *Ruth* 142). In this environment, Ruth can exist peacefully, though inhabiting it requires her transformation, this time into a young, widowed relative with the appropriate

cropped hair, wedding ring, and backstory. This masquerade enables the Bensons to keep her as a member of their household, and even when her history is exposed, she remains. The narrative extensively describes the three-floor home, and later the narrator tells us in a first-person interjection, “the chapel almost adjoined the minister’s house” (178). This close proximity to the chapel makes an awareness of Christian practices ever-present, and while she lives and works within the confines of the chapel-house, Ruth, surrounded by charity and love, is able to work towards her redemption. Eventually, she begins nursing, and it is through the sacrifice of her self—to save Bellingham’s health, no less—that she gains the respect of the village and achieves deliverance.

Gaskell’s *Ruth* elicited controversy because of the author’s “frankness on an issue of public morality” (Shelston ix). Many individuals banned the book in their households, and Gaskell wrote of copies being burned by at least two men. If Ruth’s story, which is above all a tale of poor judgment and ignorance, garnered such criticism, imagine the outcome if Gaskell had portrayed Ruth as a dissolute prostitute instead of a penitent fallen woman. *Mary Barton*, *Lizzie Leigh*, and *Ruth* illustrate a progression of Gaskell’s treatment of the “disorderly woman”—that she kept returning to the subject speaks of her determination to represent this figure’s role in society. Unfortunately, it also speaks to her inability to do so. A woman writer’s ethos was dependent upon the patriarchy’s approval; she lacked the social “voice” granted to many of her male counterparts.

As women “writing the prostitute,” Burney, Austen, and Gaskell’s narratives present an evolution of authorial response to the social problem of prostitution. Burney’s *Evelina* does not refer to prostitution directly and instead relies upon the spatial

representations of Vauxhall Garden's "dark walks" to illustrate the dangers that young women faced; in this dangerous, isolated space, Evelina is mistaken for an "actress," a euphemism for "prostitute." Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* features her most direct reference to prostitution, yet the prostitute is a background character and dies in "sin." Gaskell's work represents the current of discourse about prostitution that permeated Victorian society. Esther arguably exhibits agency at times, while Lizzie is depicted as a voiceless character. In *Ruth*, Gaskell presents the conundrum of a fallen woman who seeks redemption but can only achieve that redemption in death. All three writers employ spatial rhetorics to make claims about the prostitute—who she was, where she belonged, and what she did in those spaces. They deploy these ideas through the prostitute, a figure who navigates the internalization of social codes and marks the process through which knowledge is formed.

Why (Re)Locate the Prostitute?

Texts work to create networks of association between ideas in order to create ways of seeing the world.

– Mike Crang

The implications of my study, which advocates reading texts as process and product, include exposing the intricate relationships between space and identity that constitute the foundations of societies. These inter-relationships profoundly affect how information about spaces and people is interpreted and internalized; knowledge of these processes yields an awareness of cultural mappings and their keys. As fluid constructs,

textual and visual renderings of space and identity are slippery; we must scrutinize the spatial rhetorics at play to expose “those material and discursive practices that work to compose and enhance a space” (Enoch 276). Such a reading enables us to see beyond the rhetorical constructions—like the prostitute—that guide us as we process knowledge about space, place, and identity. If we read space “actively,” we can discern its regulatory function in its different forms: pragmatic, perceptual, existential, and cognitive (Crang 110-1). This challenges our construction of knowledge and reminds us that it is fluid, as are the codes that guide knowledge formation. As Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift argue in *Thinking Space*, “If space then, is not a neutral medium that stands outside the way it is conceived, we can trace, and dispute, various shifts in the organisation of space alongside different forms of knowledge and social institutions” (3). Since spatial representations play an integral role in our conceptualization of identity, examining spatial rhetorics exposes the constructions that inform our sense of the individual and the social body: We must acknowledge their dynamic nature in order to even attempt an understanding of how these interconnected systems operate. In this way, we are required to see beyond the subject—the prostitute, for example—as exemplum.

As rhetorical constructions, subjects direct how we form the knowledge imparted about them by texts. Scrutinizing spatial rhetorics fosters recognizance of the multi-dimensional nature of texts across genre forms. These fruitful practices should extend beyond study of the prostitute figure, as all rhetorical constructions derive, in some part, from spatial and identity rhetorics. By revealing the codes that underlie the rhetoric constituting our text-driven world, we can better understand which knowledge is ours and

which is “programmed.” This awareness encourages a balanced and ethical understanding of subjects. Interdisciplinary readings and engagement with multiple modes of inquiry further facilitate the study of spatial rhetorics, exposing the textual mappings that inform how we internalize information and generate knowledge. The resulting revelations provide a “key” to social maps, past and present.

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