

# Patriarchy And Prostitution In The Eighteenth Century: A Cause And Effect Relationship

Sultan Alghofaili

Department of English Language and Translation, College  
of Sciences and Arts in Ar Rass, Qassim University, Saudi  
Arabia. Email: [ssgfiely@qu.edu.sa](mailto:ssgfiely@qu.edu.sa)

## Abstract

This paper studies the effects of patriarchy in creating the issue of prostitution during the eighteenth century. It argues that prostitution during that time had a relationship with commercialism with the consequences of women being forced to secure a living through using their sexuality instead of their minds or hands. To achieve this goal, the paper analyzes how the issue was addressed in the literary works of Daniel Defoe, Aphra Behn, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Eliza Haywood, along with the prostitute narratives which were written during the same time. The significance of the works is that they do not only provide both, the male's and the female's perspective towards prostitution, but also the prostitute herself. The paper concludes that the eighteenth-century prostitution existed as a tool that exposed the hypocrisy of its patriarchal society, especially in terms of the inequality that was concerned with the gender and the economic rights.

Keywords: eighteenth-century literature, patriarchy, prostitution, feminism.

## 1. Introduction

From Aphra Behn's *The Rover* to Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, the theme of prostitution in the eighteenth-century literature had a very complicated history behind it. Yet, it appears that the various and contradictory representations in the dense literature of the eighteenth century could reveal deeper insights to the issue. These representations, however, kept shifting back and forth between giving a positive image that sympathized with the prostitutes through understanding

the limited options that women had during this era, and a negative one that attacked these prostitutes on moral or financial levels. Still, what is important in these contradictory representations is the suggestion that although they appear to disagree on understanding the concept of prostitution, they all shed some light on the importance of the economical aspects of the eighteenth century. In fact, it is crucial to note that during the eighteenth century, the British society witnessed a huge financial transformation into becoming a commercial one. As Laura Rosenthal (2006) argues, “we need, then, to read representations of prostitutions in this period not just in the context of infamy but also in the context of commerce” (*Infamous Commerce* p. 3). Hence, it seems that any reading of prostitution in the long eighteenth century needs to keep in mind the woman’s desperate need for the financial security that became a necessity for her surviving.

Out of understanding this financial desperation came another level of attack on prostitution that did not seem too concerned with the ethical aspects of this commerce. As a result of that, works such as *Anti-Pamela*; or *Feign’d Innocence Detected* (1741) by Eliza Haywood complicated the concept of prostitution by attacking prostitutes as fortune hunters. This different representation, however, does not only reveal more clearly the image of a materialistic society, but more importantly it draws a line that links the connection between the ethical and the financial criticism of prostitution. This appears to be a huge step that differentiates and distinguishes the literature of the eighteenth century from earlier writings. This is simply due to the idea that prior to the eighteenth century, prostitution was not fully realized as a recognized means for financial income. As Rosenthal (2006) argues, “... late seventeenth-century writers do not appear to understand prostitution as a form of labor or as bearing much of a relationship to work (except comically and ironically); they do not tend to see its most immediate significance as economic ...” (*Infamous Commerce* p. 4). Yet, she continues to write that the “eighteenth-century writers became increasingly intrigued by the disturbing intersection of the economic and the personal that prostitution comes to emblemize” (p. 4). With this crucial shift in realizing the extent of the financial influence on the

infamous trade comes a deeper analysis that looks at what lies behind the act of prostitution itself.

Hence, in order to analyze the concept of prostitution in any eighteenth-century text, we need to not only approach these works from a feminist perspective, but also with a Marxist one. This analysis starts with Karl Marx's view on prostitution where he argues, "prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer, and since it is a relationship in which falls not the prostitute alone, but also the one who prostitutes - and the latter's abomination is still greater - the capitalist, etc., also comes under this head" (cited. in Vogel p. 47). As such, one might argue that the harshness that accompanied the transformation of the British society into becoming a materialistic one, along of course with the early signs of capitalism, pushed women to use their bodies to secure a living.

A Marxist analysis of prostitution in the eighteenth century will also reveal a clash between social classes. Thereby, with the flourishing economy, the working-class found itself under the control of a new master, the bourgeoisie. This social change was not only behind the increasing demand for sexual services, but more importantly, it redefined the concept of prostitution to its modern definition that sees it as a source of income. In other words, because of the social transformation, the large presence of prostitutes in the eighteenth century could be read as a symptom of a society's unbalanced structure.

Therefore, this paper will argue that prostitution in the eighteenth century has a relationship with commercialism with the consequences of women being oppressed and forced to enter the market through using their sexuality instead of their minds or hands. To achieve this goal, the paper will analyze how the issue was addressed in the works of Daniel Defoe, Aphra Behn, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Eliza Haywood, along of course with the prostitute narratives. The importance of these particular works lies in the fact that they discuss and approach differently the concept of the eighteenth-century prostitution.

## **2. Discussion**

Perhaps one of the most obvious representations of linking prostitution to the economic survival is Defoe's *Roxana* (1724). The novel follows Roxana's story who found herself under difficult circumstances which forced her into becoming both a

mistress and a prostitute. The former happened after she was left alone to survive her unfortunate life of poverty. This turned her to be the subject of her landlord's sexual harassments, a suggestion that may indicate that like the house she lived in, she was his commodity too. Nevertheless, after a long psychological struggle, Roxana agreed to lose her virtue by accepting to become the mistress of a married man. Surprisingly, since it secured her a respectful life, that decision appeared to be a good one. Yet, it seems that what complicated this positive change in her life was the idea that living in sin should not in fact be rewarded. Especially, since in the eighteenth century, one might ask what could possibly be worse for a woman's virtue than being a mistress?

It appears that the obvious answer for this question lies in women becoming prostitutes. Unfortunately, that is exactly what Defoe's heroine ended up doing. This sudden shift happened in Roxana's plot after the unexpected death of Roxana's lover. He, as a male figure, was the person whom Roxana was counting on to support her financially. Thus, due to his death, Roxana found herself again in a desperate need for money. However, as a woman and a mother in the eighteenth century, she had very limited chances to find a work that could support her. In *Women, work & sexual politics in the eighteenth-century England*, Bridget Hill (1994) explains in details the atmosphere of the eighteenth century in regards to the scarcity of work for women. When it comes to prostitution as a work, she writes, "many single women, particularly those with children to support, restored to prostitution in the evenings to supplement their in adequate wages. For many women it was 'a rational choice', given the nature of the alternatives. Earnings were almost certainly higher than other female occupations" (p. 173). Obviously, by alternatives, Hill refers to the jobs that did not provide sufficient support such as being maids or dressmakers. So, for the eighteenth-century women, when prostitution is compared to these low paid jobs, the choice becomes a matter of finding a way for surviving. This harsh fact pushed the poor and the less unfortunate women into considering prostitution as a way of securing a living.

However, from a feminist perspective, prostitution in Roxana might also be analyzed in terms of challenging patriarchy. As such, instead of being the property of one man, Roxana decided to have control over her fate by becoming a prostitute. This

choice, however, seems to draw an important suggestion. It simply indicates that prostitution was not only an important and easy source of money, but also the idea that it reversed the norm of that society. In other words, instead of men enjoying the financial status that allowed them to have wives and mistresses, the eighteenth-century prostitutes were their exact counterparts. They too had the luxury of money and the freedom to be with multiple sexual partners. Thereby, it could possibly be argued that prostitution in the eighteenth century might be read as a challenge of its time patriarchal ideals. Especially, when one takes into consideration that after becoming a prostitute, Roxana immediately secured a huge amount of money which was more than enough for her survival.

Furthermore, Roxana redefined the whole concept of prostitution. This is simply because instead of viewing it only as a survival path for women, she established it as a profession. This comes as no surprise once we take into account the economical change that swept England during the eighteenth century. It was an enormous financial development that changed the English way of thinking. As a result of that, money took the role of religion as the force that controlled the people's actions, decisions, and feelings. Thereby, for a successful prostitute like Roxana, viewing her infamous profession as an organized business was only a logical thing. In "Defoe's Protestant Whore," Alison Conway (2015) touches Roxana's transformation of whoring through writing, "Roxana is an exceptional whore, one capable of transcending the limitation of the 'common Vice' associated with her profession in order to claim an aesthetic of excess that borders on the sublime" (p. 225). Still, Roxana was only able to exceed the norm due to a strong desire for a financial growth.

when money moves from being a necessity into being a luxury, Roxana challenges the idea of defining whoring in terms of a forced path for desperate women. This is simply because that for Roxana, prostitution did not only become a source of enjoyment and a place to practice authority, but more importantly, prostitution became a source for an income that is the equivalent of having a well-paid job in today's standards. As a result of that, prostitution created an ambitious character who believed that women could achieve social mobility in ways that were not limited to marriage. However, Defoe used this

ambition, and not prostitution itself, as the force that destroyed Roxana. As Julie Crane (2007) argues, “Roxana is an increasingly tortured character whose circumstances eventually defeat her, an overambitious fantasist who concocts for herself an aristocratic romance and destroys herself in the process” (p. 11).

Nonetheless, with all this financial success, Defoe seems to be bringing the prostitute’s ethical concern as the power that haunted prostitutes socially. It is, as Roxana may suggest, the price that women must pay if they decided to pursue prostitution. This suggestion over the prostitute’s social concern could be interpreted from Melissa Mowry’s (2004) argument in *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660–1714*. She writes, “Initially, of course, Roxana adopts the Quaker costume as a disguise that she hopes will hide her identity from her daughter, the youngest child of her first marriage to the brewer. Roxana rationalizes the masquerades on the grounds that her daughter’s discovery of her infamous mother would only besmirch the girl’s good name” (p. 72). Still, it seems one must emphasize that this uneasiness over the reputation is not attached to the prostitute herself but it was rather extended to the loved ones. This means that the prostitute knew the personal social risks, and was only concerned with how that might affect her family. However, these social and moral warnings by Defoe’s also indicate a financial successfulness for the eighteenth-century prostitution.

What is even more important in Defoe’s text is the idea of the successfulness of whoring. This successfulness, as Rosenthal (2006) argues, is not limited to the financial security of the prostitute but it goes even beyond that. She writes,

As morally disturbing a figure as Roxana may appear to some readers, whoring itself does not provoke the “blast from Heaven.” Instead, prostitution brings wealth, power, luxury, respect, status, flattery, and independence. With her elite circulation, Roxana never experiences the poverty, disease, imprisonment, transportation, and harassment by reformers that eighteenth-century sex workers historically endured. As Robert Hume points out ..., what brings Roxana’s fortune crashing down at the end of the novel is not prostitution but rather her unaccountable desire to seek out her legitimate children. (*Infamous Commerce* p. 76)

Hence, Roxana clearly moves beyond the ethical and the social concerns that surrounded the eighteenth-century prostitution to suggest that it was an alternative that was capable of achieving financial security for women.

As a result of this understanding of prostitution, one could possibly argue that the status of the importance of women's virtue was shaken by both the economical change and the severe patriarchy that surrounded the British society in the eighteenth century. This idea is summarized very clearly in Roxana's reflection of what prostitution meant to her, "I say, I could not but reflect upon the brutality and blindness of mankind; that because nature had given me a good skin and some agreeable features, should suffer that beauty to be such a bait to appetite as to do such sordid, unaccountable things to obtain the possession of it" (Defoe, p. 107). It seems that Roxana's words here suggest that while the prostitute's beauty attracted the men's attention and secured her financially, it also left her lonely and in unmarriageable state. To put it differently, the men's strong desire to be with Roxana, the prostitute, was concerned only with sexual pleasure.

Thereby, although prostitution in the eighteenth century challenged patriarchy by bringing wealth and power to women, it also, unfortunately, reemphasized the idea of women being the objects of pleasure. This suggestion, however, is not limited to Defoe's text. In fact, Aphra Behn's *The Rover* is another eighteenth-century example of how it is true that beauty, power, and charisma may change the prostitute's social status, but they were never enough to change her social class. This means that even though the prostitute may attract numerous attentions, she would always remain a temporal pleasure. Behn's play approached this idea through creating an attractive character named Angellica.

In *The Rover*, Angellica's misfortune is very similar to Roxana's. She too is forced into prostitution by her unfortunate circumstances. Yet, as we saw with Roxana, Angellica tried to use prostitution as a way to not only secure an income, but also to have some authority and individualism. As Anita Pacheco (2015) argues, "[i]n the Angellica Bianca subplot, the play examines the psychology of a woman who seeks subjectivity through the provocation of male desire... [she] has been thrown onto the world to survive as best she can, blessed with great beauty but unmarriageable. She thus adopts the

profession of prostitution in part out of financial necessity" (p. 335). What seems crucial to point out here is the repeated idea that prostitutes, unfortunately, had to rely heavily on men themselves to challenge patriarchy and consequently secure living. This irony, however, suggests that although the economical circumstance that drove women to prostitution in the eighteenth century were linked to patriarchy, the profession itself extended the idea of men being the source of the financial protection for women. This suggestion can be seen clearly once Angellica's experience with prostitution is analyzed more deeply.

Contrary to Roxana, Behn's text introduces its reader to an already fully developed and successful prostitute. Thus, when the reader meets Angelica in the play's first act, she is clearly the desire of most of the play's male characters such as Willmore, Don Pedro, and Don Antonio. These men compete to be with Angellica through offering her the highest bid. Yet when money did not seem to be enough to settle the competition, Don Pedro and Don Antonio did not hesitate to use violence to win Angellica's heart. On the surface, this gesture communicates the idea that Angelica was the ultimate woman that men dreamt of being with. However, when we focus on the fact that all this competition was aimed at being with Angellica for a particular period of time, we begin to understand some of the eighteenth-century prostitute's inner feelings. This is simply due to the suggestion that the prostitute was not only beyond the state of marriage, but also the fact that she was not even worthy of the state of being romantically loved.

That is perhaps the reason for Angellica's naivety and quick believe in any gestures that may suggest love. This naivety became evident in the incident where Willmore stole Angellica's picture and defended his action by arguing that it was not fair to have the portrait of a beautiful woman hanging on the wall and expect men to resist it. That seemed to have a strong influence on Angellica, especially, after Willmore told her that his poverty will not prevent him from finding a way to secure enough money that would allow him to be with her for a couple of days. Willmore's deceitful words and gestures convinced the prostitute's vulnerable heart and she hastily offered him her body in exchange for his love,

ANGELLICA. The pay I mean, is but thy love for mine.  
Can you give that?



WILLMORE. Entirely – come, let's withdraw, Where I'll renew  
my vows – and breathe 'em with such ardour  
thou shalt not doubt my zeal. (Behn 2.2, p. 149)

The brief exchange reveals Angellica's desperate need for a romantic relationship that is not tight to any economical goals. However, it is crucial to note that she only reached this stage of searching for love after she secured herself financially. As a result of that, she failed, or perhaps refused, to understand that her journey with prostitution had pushed her to step away from ever being a woman worthy of being a wife. Through highlighting this idea, it appears to me that Behn was successful in revealing the hypocrisy of the society of the eighteenth century. This patriarchal society simply tricked the powerful prostitutes, such as Angellica, through treating them as women of quality. At the same it considered them as nothing more than sinful tools for pleasure.

For these powerful prostitutes, this deceitful treatment creates a sense of disorientation that blurs the prostitute's understanding of her social class. Consequently, a woman like Angellica would believe that, although a whore, she is worthy of being loved. As Heidi Hutner (1993) argues,  
... when Angellica tries to move from the role of the prostitute to lover, she tellingly is abandoned by the very man who encouraged the crossing. Angellica's servants try to prevent her from falling in love with an aristocrat – they know, perhaps better than those of the upper class, how difficult and dangerous it is to transgress those boundaries of class and of feminine honor that constrain and define her. (p. 109)

It seems that Hutner's argument could be extended to suggest that in deciding to move from the state of a prostitute to a lover, Angellica did not just become a threat to the patriarchy, but to the larger British social structure. This makes her destruction the demands of not only the aristocrat or the bourgeois British male, but more importantly the bourgeois woman. This is due to the idea that although the majority of these middle class women were simply submissive mothers, wives, or daughters, they still enjoyed having the hope of moving up the social ladder through marriage. To these women, this, however, should not be the case for the prostitutes and the proletariats or any other group that is socially beneath them.

By using the prostitute as a literary tool, Behn created an atmosphere that captured the hierarchal relationship between the men and the women of the eighteenth century. In this relationship, wives were expected to be submissive, and concerned only with bearing children and raising them. On the other hand, prostitutes were expected to understand that they were merely objects of pleasure. This communicates the suggestion that the eighteenth-century male colonized the woman's body, soul, and mind. This becomes clear when one looks at the example of Angellica. In this example, even when the woman was a prostitute and free of the direct control of men, she was always going to be a slave under the mercy of patriarchy. Behn makes this suggestion clear in the play's final scene that contained Angellica's moment of realization,

ANGELICA. But when love held the mirror, the undeceiving glass

Reflected all the weakness of my soul, and made me know  
My richest treasure being lost, my honour,  
All the remaining spoil could not be worth  
The conqueror's care or value. Oh how I fell like a long  
worshipped idol Discovering all the cheat. (5.1.273-279)

When looking more deeply at these few lines, the experience of Angellica with prostitution reveals crucial insights. As such, instead of having connotations with money and financial security, a phrase like "richest treasure" becomes the synonym of virtue, purity, and innocence. In almost an identical way, one might associate "the weakness of my soul" to the sexual pleasures or the instinct feelings of love, but here it appears that this weakness is nothing but the money which not only the prostitutes of the eighteenth century were searching for, but women in general. By altering the meanings of these phrases, Behn suggests that Angellica's true identity was lost in the midst of a larger eighteenth-century's feminine struggle that extended beyond any prostitute's ability.

Therefore, it could be argued that although Angellica's character had some authority, she too, like Roxana, was reemphasizing the men's supremacy. This suggestion stems from the fact that prostitution in the eighteenth century did not help women to gain their rights, but rather pushed men to extend their control over them. This idea can be seen in arguments like Pacheco's (1998) where she writes, "Behn, however, consistently exposes the flaws in Angellica's subject

position, not only by anchoring it in a compensatory strategy, but also by showing that the process of inciting male desire reinforces the diminishment she is striving to erase" (p. 336). This reinforcement of patriarchy, however, should not be analyzed through the outcome of the profession itself, but rather through looking at the whole atmosphere of the eighteenth-century's patriarchy. This patriarchal atmosphere oppressed women and forced some into prostitution where financial means could be provided.

Therefore, when addressing the issue of prostitution in the eighteenth century, one might expect to see works such as Eliza Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (1741) that presents the suggestion that women might even be raised to look at prostitution as their only salvation for economical security. Yet, it seems to be difficult to consider Haywood's heroine a prostitute in our modern understanding of the word. Hence, when discussing this particular text, one needs to keep in mind Rosenthal's (2008) definition of the eighteenth-century prostitution. She argues, "for centuries in England, however, a woman could be called a 'prostitute' or a 'whore' to indicate that she engaged in any form of illicit sexual activity rather than necessarily to imply the exchange of money for sexual service" (*Nightwalkers* xii). This definition is helpful when interpreting the actions of Haywood's Syrena Tricksey and her mother within their right context that perceived them as acts of prostitution.

In her outburst against Samuel Richardson's representation of the simplicity of the female mind, Haywood created Syrena as the sarcastic figure who contradicted Pamela's simple and weak image of a woman. Yet, even if it obviously has some sarcastic goals to mock a popular work that dominated its time, *Anti-Pamela* is still crucial in its representation of the eighteenth-century prostitution. This is simply due to the suggestion that although Haywood's heroine, Syrena, was smart, deceitful, determined, and ambitious, she understood that prostitution and tricking men into falling for her were the only options available for her to survive, "*Anti-Pamela* is a complex novel that offers an alternative didacticism that teaches cunning, duplicity and ultimately, self-sufficiency within the treacherous financial and sexual economies women confront" (Haywood, p. 37). In other words, *Anti-Pamela* touches indirectly the issue of how the patriarchal world of the eighteenth century did not just create limited financial options for women, but also made them

convinced that using sex was the only possible way to break away from these economical limitations.

This awful combination of the women's reduced financial opportunities, and the tendency to perceive them mainly as sexual objects is behind, as Rivka Swenson (2010) argues, Haywood's critique of Pamela. Swenson writes,

In *Anti-Pamela*, Haywood's interest manifests in an exploration of, first, the gendered implications that attended assumptions about vulnerable "subjects" and empowered "objects" and, second, the material (as well as symbolic) limits to the kind of empowerment that intramittist theories about vision and ontology seemed to promise to women in real social spaces. (p. 28)

This appears to be the suggestion that brings to my attention the issue of prostitution in *Anti-Pamela*. To illustrate more, Swenson talks about the power relations between the subject and the object in the materialistic world of the eighteenth century. Yet, since the male had full control over the sources of money, he was positioned as the ultimate subject of the materialistic world. As a result of that, the woman and all of her feminine qualities, especially, her beauty, sexuality, and even innocence, became one of the important objects of this materialistic world. Hence, in order to have any subjectivity, she needed to rely on those qualities. This reliance, however, meant that prostitution was going to be an option that could not be overlooked.

In this rewriting of Richardson's *Pamela*, the clever Syrena is a fifteen-year old girl who is not trained by her mother to use her beauty to only deceive men, but also to do whatever it takes to keep the fake image of her innocence intact. To that end, she learned how to terminate her accidental pregnancy in order to enter the house of the aristocratic Sir Thomas as the innocence and young maid. And once she was part of that household, she began the psychological manipulating of both Sir Thomas and his son, Mr. L\_. As part of her scheme, she created a series of romantic situations that pushed the father and his son to make numerous sexual advances on her. Surprisingly, all of Syrena's plans seemed to be working for her advantage till she decided to fake a rape scene that would force Mr. L\_ to marry her. This resulted in the jailing of Mr. L\_. However, upon the discovery of a letter between Syrena and her mother, their plan failed and Syrena was sent away to Wales.

Still, although this unfortunate end may suggest failure, Syrena's journey should not be considered as a total failure. The reason lies in the fact that Syrena was able to generate a sufficient amount of money that she, along with her mother, spent recklessly. This crucial fact does not only suggest a partial success for Syrena's scheme, but more importantly it reveals insights to the female's accessorial aspiration that was difficult to achieve without being born into. Syrena's superficial aspiration, however, was the result of the economical change that dominated the British society in the eighteenth century. Thereby, it seems that because of the advancement of the bourgeoisie, women during this period of the British history, regardless of their social class, started to look at these accessories as necessities.

By reading Haywood's text with the understanding that Syrena's devious decisions were in fact made out of a necessity that searched for a better life, one might realize how patriarchy in the eighteenth century forced women to play according to its own rules. As such, any greedy and cunning personalities such as Syrena's and her mother's, should be read in relation to the eighteenth-century's male figure. This means that the characters of both the landlord in *Roxana* and Willmore in *The Rover* present examples of the patriarchal selfishness. Hence, when analyzing the choices made by Syrena and her mother, one has to keep in mind the cultural context that they tried to survive in.

However, other writers of the eighteenth century viewed prostitution in a slightly different way. Especially, in terms of generating explicit feelings of sympathy towards the prostitute. One example of such works is Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). In this novel, readers are introduced to Jemima who did not only have an awful life prior and after she became a prostitute, but more importantly, she was miserable during her time as a prostitute. Robin Runia (2013) discussed Jemima's unfortunate whoring experience in "Sympathetic Suffering in Eighteenth-Century Prostitution Narratives." He argues, "... Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* provides an example of the whore who considers herself both a suffering object and a monstrous perpetrator" (p. 110). Still, what drove Jemima to see herself as a monstrous perpetrator was caused by deep remorse and shame over being a prostitute.

In *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, Jemima is not the main character of Wollstonecraft's text. This is due to the fact that the novel is mainly focused on the story of Maria, and not the prostitute. Yet, Wollstonecraft presented Jemima's struggle with patriarchy as equal to the heroine's, if not more. In doing so, the famous eighteenth-century female activist wanted to argue that prostitutes deserved the same sympathy as any other English woman. In other words, whether it was the awfulness of Jemima's fortune or Maria's, the English woman was a victim of patriarchal injustice regardless of the path she followed. As Vivien Jones (1997) points out, "through the juxtaposition of Jemima both with Maria's story and with other women's testimonies to financial and physical abuse, the figure of the prostitute in *Wrongs of Woman* becomes the type of all women's experience" (p. 211). Vivien's argument reconfirms the idea that the prostitute of the eighteenth century was a part of the female structure of the English society, and that she was not a cast-off member.

In Wollstonecraft's novel, Jemima was the guard of the asylum that Maria was imprisoned in. Yet, what seems to be ironic was the idea that the guard was not in any better situation when it came to the male's injustice. Jemima's shared her patriarchal struggle with Maria by telling her about how she ended up as the asylum guard. Being raised motherless, she was forced to work as a servant, a job that left her vulnerable for a life of sexual harassments. These harassments evolved eventually to rape,

At sixteen, I suddenly grew tall, and something like comeliness appeared on a Sunday, when I had time to wash my face, and put on clean clothes. My master had once or twice caught hold of me in the passage; but I instinctively avoided his disgusting caresses. One day however, when the family were at a methodist meeting, he contrived to be alone in the house with me, and by blows—yes; blows and menaces, compelled me to submit to his ferocious desire; and, to avoid my mistress's fury, I was obliged in future to comply, and skulk to my loft at his command, in spite of increasing loathing. (Wollstonecraft, p. 32)

This defining moment of Jemima's life does not only indicate that she was raped during her years of puberty, but more importantly, it also suggests the idea that she was perceived by her master to be a sex slave. That is due to the master's

constant sexual assaults that were carried out along with threats over letting the secret exposed. However, after she became pregnant as a result of those assaults, he forced her to leave the house. Desperate, lonely, and frightened, Jemima was forced to terminate the pregnancy and turn to prostitution. However, it was a decision that was taken not because it was the only available option, but because Jemima's past forced her to believe that her body was the only thing that she could use. It is true that Jemima turned to prostitution after these unfortunate incidents. Yet, when prostitution is understood as sex in exchange for survival, then we might be able to see Jemima entering the world of the eighteenth-century prostitution once her master raped her for the first time. This is because starting from that horrible moment, Jemima's body became her qualifications for keeping her job as a maid. So, when looking at the world from Jemima's perspective, maintaining this low-class job meant having food and shelter. In this sense, for the poor, the eighteenth-century prostitution did not have to be always concerned with money. It is basically as a survival game played according to the rules of patriarchy. This explains Jemima's strange decision to stay under the same roof as her abusive master. On the surface, one might read Jemima's relationship with her master as a story of a woman being victimized physically, sexually, and psychologically. Yet, when one reads this relationship closely, it becomes clear that Jemima was a smart survivor who understood not just the cruelty of her master, but also the cruelty of her world. Thus, once Jemima stepped out of her master's house, she began a different survival game that was set by the society. This meant that she needed to be an official prostitute who provided her sexual services for multiple men. However, by continuing to have this negative relationship with the male figure, she began to see more clearly the reality of her patriarchal world. This means that she understood that she needs to be selfish and look for only her interests. As Janet Todd (1980) writes, "Wollstonecraft stresses Jemima's coldness. Prolonged misery has taught her to follow 'masculine' reason until it becomes synonymous with selfishness. Her escape from the workhouse, where poverty and prostitution have landed her, occurs only when she accepts forty pounds a year on condition" (p. 19). This condition was to basically look away from the miseries of the people whom she was going to see in

the asylum. However, as a victim of rape and prostitution, she was well trained to accept such a condition, “a life of continual misery has already taught her these selfish skills, and she easily accepts the offer” (Todd, p. 19). Bearing this in mind, it appears that prostitution shaped a stronger personality for Jemima. Yet, when this suggestion is considered in the context of this paper, it seems that it creates a dilemma. This is due to idea that the personalities of other prostitutes such as Roxana’s and Angellica’s were weak and vulnerable. In other words, it seems that their experiences with the awful world of the eighteenth-century prostitution did not destroy their feelings of compassion, love, or mercy. Therefore, this requires understanding of Jemima’s experience with prostitution in relation to the experience of a different prostitute. This is simply due to the idea that this comparison will provide crucial suggestions to how the prostitution of the eighteenth-century is an insightful symptom of a deeper female oppression.

Hence, although one might easily argue that the circumstances that pushed Jemima to prostitution were not very different from the ones that pushed other prostitutes such as Roxana. The crucial difference between the two representations of prostitution lies in what aspects the two authors tried to emphasize. More precisely, Roxana’s and Jemima’s roads to prostitution. Roxana’s heroine entered prostitution through a psychological force. It was a combination of financial desperation and sexual persuasion by her landlord. Those were the two forces that prepared her to accept the idea of prostitution. On the other hand, Jemima entered the world of prostitution through a physical force, which was symbolized in her master’s rape. This was not only a forced sexual act, but it was also a forced suggestion for Jemima to consider prostitution. As such, in looking at how Defoe and Wollstonecraft were different in their understanding of the reasons that pushed women into prostitution, one might be able to see how the extent of sympathizing with the prostitutes was not always equal.

The different historical contexts within the eighteenth century are the most convincing explanation for the different levels of sympathy towards prostitutes. Thus, while Roxana was published in 1724, Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman was published in 1798. In other words, there were almost seven decades of social change that helped to form a better



understanding of prostitution. By better understanding, I mean that because patriarchy was stronger during the beginning of the eighteenth century, representations of prostitutes were less sympathetic, “[e]arly eighteenth-century texts reveal a complicated view of the prostitute that, while blaming her, acknowledges difficult economic circumstances” (Runia, p. 98). However, after the positive social change and the eighteenth-century feminist activism, the understanding of prostitution became more sympathetic. As Runia (2013) continues to argue, “later eighteenth-century texts remove the blame for prostitution from seduced women to place it squarely on the sexual double standard and on those who would deny women viable paths to economic independence” (p. 98). Yet, this raises the question that asks about the kinds of works that helped to change the image of the prostitutes, and consequently generate more sympathy towards them.

When it comes to the representations of prostitution in eighteenth-century literature, one must consider the prostitute narratives. The reason behind this claim lies in the fact that these narratives evoked different set of reactions. Especially, in terms of evoking feelings of compassion towards the prostitute’s financial struggles. As Rosenthal (2008) writes, “they [prostitute narratives] offered sensual and sentimental journeys, glimpses into high life and low life, and relentless confrontations with the explosive power of money and the vulnerability of those without it” (Nightwalkers, p. ix). Yet, instead of theorizing and exemplifying the female’s financial difficulties through the use of fictional works such as novels and plays, prostitute narratives deliver those financial struggles through practical examples.

Therefore, even though Angellica’s, Jemima’s, and Roxana’s experiences were written from different perspectives. Roxana’s being written from the male’s perspective and the other being written from the female’s. They still do not take us inside the world of the eighteenth-century prostitution. This is not only due to the fact they are fictional works of literature, but also because their authors, whether that was Behn, Defoe, or Wollstonecraft, were not concerned with making the prostitute’s story the main concern of the work. Hence, a closer look at the prostitute narratives in works such as Nightwalkers (2008) would provide further insights to the eighteenth-century prostitution from the prostitutes’ own perspective. This

suggestion could also be supported by the *Nightwalkers*' interesting introduction by Rosenthal where she differentiates between the representation of prostitutes in eighteenth-century literature, and the prostitute narratives through arguing,

While domestic novels commonly glimpse the prostitute as domesticity's terrifying alternative, unfortunate fallout, and haunting double, the narratives in this volume position the prostitute herself as the text's point of entry. Certainly some of them disapprove of this "infamous commerce"; nevertheless, they all invite readers to view the world through a whore's perspective, however authentically or inauthentically. (*Nightwalkers* p. xiv)

Still, the major issue that surrounds the prostitute narratives such as *Nightwalkers* is concerned with the question of who authored these narratives. As Linda Merians (2010) points out in her review of *Nightwalkers* regarding the suggestion that the narratives in the book were not written by the prostitutes themselves. She argues, "readers of this anthology, however, should not come to it expecting to find any narratives actually written by prostitutes themselves" (p. 247). However, since the narratives in *Nightwalkers* were in fact written by people who claimed to have a close relationship with the prostitutes, they can still provide the same amount of the genuine insights to the prostitute's struggles.

In fact, all the five narratives in *Nightwalkers* provide similar insights about the issue of the eighteenth-century prostitution. As such, including just one representation of these narratives could in fact achieve the goal of discussing the prostitute narrative as part of the whole concept of the eighteenth-century prostitution. Hence, a closer look at *An Account of the Death of F.S. Who died April 1763, Aged Twenty-Six Years* by Martin Madan would offer clearly the suggestion that the basic argument of these narrative was to simply demand "compassion rather than condemnation" (Rosenthal, p. xv). This is due to the fact Madan's heroine, Fanny Sidney, was a victim of a patriarchal society that refused to offer her any humanitarian help. As Rosenthal points out, "Madan's narrative places less emphasis on female weakness and instead explores the limited opportunities available to women's in Fanny situation" (*Nightwalkers* xv).

The story of Fanny Sidney was originally based on a whole different understanding of prostitution. To illustrate more, for Maden, the main concern is not attached to the profession of prostitution itself, but rather to sympathize with the prostitute, and use her as an example of the social constraints that were drawn on all women. Although this argument might also be extended to works such as Defoe's or Behn's, what makes Maden's narrative unique is its explicit, instead of being indirect, attack on the social limitations. As Merians (2010) suggests regarding the five narratives in *Nightwalkers*, "there seems to be a uniform recognition that the women fell into the trade out of necessity, and while it is true that some pursued it with more gusto than others, all the women are seen as unfortunate to some degree" (p. 248). Besides being explicit in its criticism of the patriarchal society, the narrative of Fanny Sidney emphasizes the morality of the prostitute in order to generate more compassion towards her. Maden writes about his heroine, "while she was in the midst of all her Wickedness, she had strong Remonstrances from her Conscience ..." (qtd in *Nightwalkers* p. 192). Thus, it seems that because it builds the whole work based on the perspective of the prostitute, Maden's narrative was more successful in generating attention towards the struggles of these unfortunate women.

### **3. Conclusion**

Prostitution in the eighteenth century was a reality which literature did not try to hide or overlook. In fact, it was an almost constant theme that kept repeating itself from different approaches. For instance, while Haywood believed that prostitutes could be dangerous and deceitful, Wollstonecraft, appeared to be hugely sympathetic with them. Thus, each representation of prostitution in the literature of the eighteenth century communicates different ideas that seem to be flowing in the same direction. This direction was always effected by the patriarchal powers that controlled the eighteenth-century society. In this sense, the character of the prostitute started to play a major role in exposing the severity of this patriarchy. Especially, in terms of the financial aspects that appeared to be the driving force that pushed women into prostitution. Yet, that does not mean that prostitution was only the equivalent of surviving. In fact, it appears that the eighteenth-century literature is suggesting that the prostitutes

had mixed their surviving goals with aspirations of insuring better lives. Still, what is important in both goals is the suggestion that women saw prostitution as the only option for making sufficient amount of money.

It appears that the fruits of the economic advancement of the eighteenth century were always falling in the pockets of the bourgeoisie. This created a bourgeoisie hegemony that did not only govern the society, but it also used the poor as tools for pleasure. However, being the weakest link of this rapid change, the woman of the working class found herself obligated to use desperate means in order to survive. Consequently, the economical aspects of life started to challenge any given social or religious beliefs. For instance, the whole idea of the women's virtue became heavily challenged as the result of those financial needs. Yet, although breaking these social and religious rules helped women to get into prostitution and secure themselves financially, it, unfortunately, failed to bring them back into being an equal member of the society.

Therefore, even in overcoming the financial issue, the eighteenth-century prostitute found herself a castaway member who was not worthy of being loved nor respected. So, no matter how the prostitute was successful or desired, she was always going to be haunted by the overall norms of her society. This is because that she was constantly being forced to remember that she was not an equal member of the society. However, this idea reveals a severe social hypocrisy. This is due to the suggestion that as a woman, she was judged according to the social rules, but as a prostitute, she was treated outside of these rules.

Within this dilemma, the concept of the eighteenth-century prostitution existed as a tool that exposed the hypocrisy of its patriarchal society. The reason for this claim stems from the idea that once we start considering the prostitute as a member who looked at her society from the outside, then we will be able to see all the aspects of inequality. More particularly, the inequality that was concerned with the gender and the economic rights. As such, it might be argued that with all its different representations of prostitution, the literature of the eighteenth century brings crucial insights to how this castaway member exposed the hypocrisy of her patriarchal world.

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