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Whoring the *Flâneur*: Re-visioning the American Woman of the Town

Though women lived and worked alongside men in the metropolises of nineteenth-century America, their access to the city was limited, and the fiction of the period expresses intense anxiety regarding the wandering urban woman. While writers such as Charles Baudelaire idealize and romanticize the male *flâneur*, they dismiss the female city wanderer as licentious and immoral, associated most frequently with the figure of the prostitute. An indicator of her society's moral degeneration, the prostitute in nineteenth-century American fiction is a complex character: personifying and satirizing her culture's obsession with economic consumption, her body becomes an abject symbol of filth and disease that is at once stigmatized and desired. Responding to male-authored examinations of *flânerie*, feminist critics have debated whether a nineteenth-century female *flâneur* could exist, and Susan Buck-Morss has agreed with Elizabeth

Wilson in arguing that “Prostitution was indeed the female version of *flânerie*” (Buck-Morss 119). Such arguments, however, oversimplify the crucial differences between prostitution and male *flânerie*. While women’s access to the American city was becoming less restricted in the nineteenth century (as Lydia Maria Child’s *Letters from New York* arguably suggests), the social anxiety regarding the prostitute’s body and the self-sufficiency it personifies undermines a connection to the *flâneur*’s romanticized wandering. Unlike the wealthy and idle *flâneur*, the literary prostitute wanders as the result of economic necessity. Moreover, as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (1832) Charles Brockden Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn* (1799/1800), and George Thompson’s *City Crimes* (1849) suggest, the prostitute is curiously stationary compared to the male urban wanderer. Rarely depicted by these authors as aimlessly rambling through the city, she instead works specific streets or operates out of her own home. The literary prostitute is fixed, localized, and depraved in a way that the male city wanderer is not. Sheltered from view and immured in the home, she parodies the virtues of the domestic woman rather than correspond to the stereotype of street walker, infiltrating the private realm and defiling the virtuous domesticity so prized in nineteenth-century America.

Deemed “the greatest fear of the age,” prostitution was viewed as a social evil that infected and disintegrated society’s foundations (Wilson [1992] 92). Published in Paris in 1836, for example, Dr. Parent-Duchâtelet’s *On Prostitution*, the first major investigation into the sex trade, explicitly linked prostitutes to urban filth (Wilson [2002] 421). Duchâtelet expresses his anxiety over the potential contamination that resulted from interacting with prostitutes, equating prostitution with all things “putrid,” “abject,” and “disgusting” (421). William W. Sanger’s *The History of Prostitution* (1858), presented as an official report to the Board of Alms-House Governors of New York City, similarly characterizes the prostitute in terms of her moral and

physical contamination. Having questioned 2000 prostitutes in New York City and determining their average age to be 23, he concludes that juvenile degradation inevitably gives way to “premature old age”:

[The prostitute’s] step is elastic, her eye bright, she is the “observed of all observers.” The *habitués* of the [brothel] flock around her, gloat over her ruin while they praise her beauty. . . . But this life of gay depravity can not last; her mind becomes tainted of the moral miasma in which she lives; her physical powers wane under the trials imposed upon them, and her career in a fashionable house of prostitution comes to an end; she must descend in the ladder of vice.
(Sanger 453)

With prostitutes claiming their cities’ busiest streets as their “personal turfs,” and courtesans loitering in hotels and theatres, the prostitute was considered at once polluted and polluting as prostitution became an increasingly visible occupation in America (Gilfoyle 18). Timothy Gilfoyle cites an 1855 copy of the New York *Tribute* that decried the visibility of prostitutes on Broadway and claimed that “One is so accustomed to the sight of these gaudily dressed butterflies that the street looks very strange without them” (30). The prostitute was ubiquitous on city streets.

As theorized by Charles Baudelaire, Georg Simmel,¹ and, more recently, Walter Benjamin, the *flâneur* is the embodiment of nineteenth-century urban modernity. Defined in the *Encyclopaedia Lanesse* (1808) as “a lazybones . . . who doesn’t know where to carry his trouble and his boredom” (qtd. in Ferguson 24), the *flâneur* is a social deviant, an idler who serves no

¹ See, for example, Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life.”

tangible social purpose. Though he originates in Europe (nineteenth-century Paris according to Priscilla Ferguson's genealogy, and eighteenth-century London according to Dana Brand's), the *flâneur* is a complex figure, encapsulating at once a specific historical moment in a given geographic location and a more general reaction to the consumerism that was coming to define the West. As a historical figure, the *flâneur* existed in the midst of rapid industrialization, and Deborah Parsons argues that his free reign of the city was coming under increasing attack as the nineteenth century progressed (19). He is thus, by definition, someone who is "out of place," and wanders *because* he has no place (19). Ferguson's argument that he is marked by an "ostentatious inaction" (25) also implies that the *flâneur*, with his abundance of leisure time and seemingly inexhaustible funds, is not only gendered but also classed. *Flânerie* is, by definition, a bourgeois male prerogative.

The majority of critical discussions of the *flâneur* draw on Baudelaire's analysis, and focus particularly on the *flâneur*'s paradoxical social involvement and social alienation. In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire describes the *flâneur* as an artistic "*man of the world*," one who possesses a broad understanding of society and all its intricacies (Baudelaire 7; original emphasis). He is wholly independent, and though detached from society, he views it with child-like curiosity: "The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and the water of fishes" (9). Though he is the "centre of the world," he is also "hidden" from it (9). Susan Buck-Morss suggests that his purpose as an artist is to loiter and commodify the city, writing or painting what he sees and then selling his account (111). He is paradoxically seen and unseen, constantly present but rarely interacting with his fellow city dwellers, and Ferguson elaborates on the *flâneur*'s simultaneous visibility and anonymity (26-31). He knows the geography and sites of his city, and though he traverses the metropolis independently and at random, he is perpetually

anonymous and always at a distance. Never a hidden surveyor, he observes and is observed. His relationship to the city is consequently a reciprocal and paradoxical one: he is at once a part of and apart from the metropolis and its inhabitants.

He is also explicitly European, and the *flâneur* of Baudelaire's, Simmel's, and Benjamin's analyses botanizes on the asphalt² of teeming, sprawling, well-established metropolises like Paris and London. Though Dana Brand acknowledges that the American *flâneur* was "undeniably and even slavishly derivative of his London and Paris models" (78), however, he ultimately identifies *flânerie* in the works of Poe, Hawthorne, and Whitman. The possible existence of the American *flâneur* is, nonetheless, debatable, and while Brand notes that America was primarily urban by the nineteenth century, he also acknowledges that American cities were no comparison in size and scale to their European counterparts, and did not offer the variety of spectacle or vastness of space required by the *flâneur* (66). The *flâneur* is consequently both gendered and geographically marked, and the cultural component of *flânerie* complicates an attempt to relocate the *flâneur* across the Atlantic. Complicating an American *flâneur* subsequently requires a reconsideration of the potential for female *flânerie* in America. Given the makeup of the American city and gender relations in nineteenth-century America, the American *flâneuse* becomes an especially debatable figure.

By definition, then, the European *flâneur* can have no direct American analogue, and Brand himself notes that the first literary depictions of *flânerie* by American authors were set in major European cities (66). Edgar Allan Poe's canonical "The Man of the Crowd" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," for example, are set in London and Paris, respectively. Brand

² See Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*.

argues that the tourist and the *flâneur* are conflated in these early portrayals, and suggests that writers such as Poe were influenced by British accounts of crowded European life, mostly notably Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* and Addison and Steele's *The Spectator* (66).

“[A]bsorbed in contemplation of the scene” beyond his London café window (Poe 399), Poe's protagonist in “The Man of the Crowd” taxonomizes the crowd while remaining completely distinct from it. Though he initially only notices the white-collared individuals in the crowd, his gaze quickly moves to the poor and criminal city dwellers, to the gamblers and “Jew pedlars” with which “all great cities are infested” (400). Poe employs the language of sickness in a story that centres on a narrator newly recovered from some unnamed illness. Unlike the criminals, however, the protagonist is not framed as an infectious threat, nor is he described as sharing their “swarthy complexion...filmy dimness of eye, and pallor and compression of lip” (400). Rather, Poe casts the fever that leaves his protagonist's intellect “electrified” (398) in a quasi-romantic light: while the urban criminal class—which includes the “rabid” (401) women of the town—is equated to a mass of infected bodies, the protagonist maintains a level of decency and purity. Though he only wanders amongst the working classes after his health has been compromised, he is not reduced to their squalor.

Poe's crowd is predominantly male. Women, however, were hardly invisible in the nineteenth-century city, and Elizabeth Wilson asserts that they were constantly in the public sphere, regardless of men's attempts to restrain and control their mobility ([1992] 93). Her description of Paris's “zones of pleasure” (93) suggests that the city's cafés, theatres, and restaurants provided numerous opportunities for women to socialize beyond the domestic sphere. Arguably, the “public woman” was becoming less of an oxymoron. In fact, the vast majority of

women were, to some extent, public women, and numerous critics³ have noted that the department stores of the 1850s and 60s allowed women to wander alone in the city, with window shopping serving as a kind of *flânerie* (Wolff [1994] 124).

American writer and activist Lydia Maria Child occupies a comparable position of independence in her *Letters from New York*. She projects a touristic gaze onto the city's underprivileged, and at times shares the *flâneur*'s blasé indifference: she enjoys New York because she largely overlooks its atrocities, emphasizing its "pretty parks" over its squalor and "black gutters" (Child 2). Like Baudelaire's *flâneur*, who prizes voyeuristic observation over social empathy, Child is never subsumed by the crowd she observes, and maintains her independence almost to the point of alienation, acknowledging that "[i]t is sad walking in the city... The busy throng, passing and repassing, fetter freedom while they offer no sympathy. The loneliness of the soul is deeper, and far more restless, than in the solitude of the mighty forest" (82). Having embarked on a self-proclaimed "world pilgrimage" (137), Child appears to traverse the city at large and at random, and in an inadvertent parody of the prostitute, she frequently wanders at night, walking along the Hudson "by the moonlight" (20) and "linger[ing] about the Battery at sunset" (48). The "lady's" place is, by contrast, in the home. Discussing the New Year's Day festivities in New York, Child explains that "[e]very woman, that *is* 'anybody' stays at home, dressed in her best" (75; Child's emphasis). Child's ramblings set her in direct contrast to the ideal female, whom she suggests is stagnant and housebound.

To argue that Child is a *flâneuse*, however, overlooks the subtleties of her social purpose and situation. The friend to whom she refers is male, and while Child's indiscriminate wandering

³ See, for example, Anne Friedberg's *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* and Christopher Prendergast's *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*.

suggests her sense of freedom and safety in New York, it must be noted that she is always accompanied by a male chaperone. Unlike the *flâneur*, Child is not free to move independently about the city. The restrictions on her mobility undermine and complicate an association between her and the *flâneur*, supporting Janet Wolff's argument that the character of the *flâneuse* was "rendered impossible by the sexual distinctions of the nineteenth century" ([1994] 45).

Arguments in support of the *flâneuse* are contentious largely because, as Wolff contends in "The Invisible Flâneuse," the literature of modernity is predominantly male-authored (37). Her argument that "modern" is synonymous with "public" in the texts examining metropolitan life (such as those by Baudelaire and Simmel) (37) suggests that they cannot account for women's experiences of modernity. Notably, feminist discussions of the *flâneur* largely respond to analyses of European *flânerie*. Since the American *flâneur* is already a dubious figure—if, indeed, he can exist at all—then discussions of the American *flâneuse* are doubly contentious. Not only did the gender relations of nineteenth-century America impede women's ability to wander the city, thereby making the *flâneuse* an unlikely figure, the composition of the American metropolis also challenged the potential for her existence. Indeed, whether in Europe or America, the wandering urban woman is rarely completely autonomous or marked for her femininity. Like Lydia Maria Child, French author George Sand, for example, was literally confined by her gender, unable to transcend the gendered spaces of the city because of her sex. Writing in 1831, Sand describes how she dressed as a boy to gain unmediated access to Paris and traverse the city freely: donning a suit, tie, and hat, she remarks that "No one knew me, no one looked at me, no one found fault with me; I was an atom lost in that immense crowd" (41). With its prototype a European male, the *flâneur* translates un-easily across gender or geographic boundaries.

Though Wilson and Buck-Morss have argued that prostitution was a woman's primary mode of *flânerie* in the nineteenth century, both Wolff and Ferguson suggest that women's ties to economics and consumption counteract their potential for *flânerie*. Wolff goes on to note that the rise of the European department store in mid-century did not afford women greater independence in the city, but made them increasingly dependent on men's finances: the shopping woman is, in effect, little more than a "public [sign] of [her] husband's wealth" ([1985] 44). Wilson proposes that the prostitute's selling of her body corresponds to the *flâneur*'s selling of his art (424), and by characterizing the *flâneur* as the "rootless outsider" of modern life, Wilson asserts that he had a certain affinity with the social and sexual deviants located on the periphery of society ([2002] 424). By arguing that women are a part of the urban landscape that the *flâneur* observes, however, Ferguson establishes a connection between women and consumption—as well as the consumption of women—in the nineteenth-century city that will prove integral in analyzing depictions of the prostitute in American literature.

The women whom Baudelaire describes participating in public life are similarly commodified and invariably marginalized, and his vilification of the wandering woman complicates her association with the *flâneur*. The women in *The Painter of Modern Life* are marked by their conscious attempts to make people notice and observe them, and he foregrounds this connection between women and the social gaze in his discussion of the prostitute: with "nothing to communicate," she is a diversion to "real world" concerns, "a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance" (Baudelaire 30). Parsons suggests that the prostitute is a chaotic figure for Baudelaire because she flouts the artist/*flâneur*'s attempts to categorize her (24). Baudelaire is at once dismissive of and fascinated with the prostitute and her relationship to modern society, as she is comparable to

the *flâneur* in her wandering and observing, to the dandy in her active displaying of herself, and to the rag-picker in her destitution (24). He extensively discusses the aesthetics of the prostitute, equating her to the “Protean image of wanton beauty” who embodies a “provocative and barbaric sort of elegance” (Baudelaire 36). Though Baudelaire’s prostitute, like Poe’s women of the town, initially appears to be a beautiful work of art, she is little more than a “wrinkled, bejewelled and paint-begrimed beldame,” immoral, sullied, and “filled with filth” (Poe 401). While the *flâneur* is characterized by his amorality, the prostitute is equated to “the perfect image of the savagery that lurks in our midst...a sort of gipsy wandering on the fringes of regular society” (Baudelaire 36-7). The comparison to gypsies had a particularly criminal resonance in the nineteenth century. Characterized by criminologist Cesare Lombroso as “[l]overs of orgies and noise,” gypsies were a highly sexed, “thoroughly criminal race, with all its passions and vices” (Lombroso 119). Comparable to “savages and criminals” (119), gypsies epitomized social upheaval and chaos, and the wandering woman is similarly denigrated and associated with lax morals. While he idealizes the wandering urban man, Baudelaire suggests that the wandering urban woman must have an ulterior motive, and though the prostitute is liminal like the *flâneur* she does not aestheticize the city with a detached gaze. Instead, she is a “woman in revolt” (Baudelaire 37), a woman who flouts the dumb passivity Baudelaire prizes and the domestic stasis that marks the “lady” in Child’s *Letters*. The prostitute scoffs at gender norms, often to the point of being “masculine in [her] brazenness” (38), and Baudelaire overlooks the irony of such transgressive behaviour in a woman who commodifies her femininity. She is inherently linked to social upheaval. She is a threat.

She is also notably absent, however, from the literature of the period. The very invisibility of the prostitute in nineteenth-century American literature renders her a curious

analogue to the *flâneur*. In Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*, and Thompson's *City Crimes*, the prostitute is a silent and repressed figure who exists at the literal margins of society. Presented through the eyes of a wandering man in each text, she is described briefly and in passing. Her profession is not explicitly named, but hinted at through thin veils. Unlike the *flâneur*, she makes a conscious effort to connect with her fellow city dwellers, for they are her source of income. She does not have the luxury of living in self-willed isolation, and her livelihood requires that she seek connections with the society that paradoxically rejects and carries on intimate transactions with her. Moreover, Hawthorne, Brown, and Thompson never depict the prostitute engaging in anything remotely resembling *flânerie*. Confusing the categories of sexual deviant and refined lady, the prostitute is housebound and entices clients into her home while rarely—if ever—crossing its threshold. Though she possesses her own gaze, she is sheltered from view, as society's gaze is a threat for her, a harbinger of judgement and scorn. She is implicitly connected to disease and infection, her body seen as a threat to society's health, and she is tied to her physicality in a way that the *flâneur* is not. On the contrary, Deborah Parsons argues that the *flâneur* is, for all intents and purposes, entirely chaste, and though he may be surrounded by women, he (theoretically) abstains from sexual relationships with them (17). While the prostitute is marked by her capacity to sate the appetites of others, the *flâneur* is characterized by his disconnected autonomy and subsequent ability to transcend his sexual needs.

Hawthorne, Brown, and Thompson's young heroes are each introduced to the city through this symbol of female depravity. She is a sphinx of sorts, a figure whom the male protagonist must encounter in order to enter the metropolis. If the city is, as Charles Brockden Brown terms it, the "chosen seat of misery and vice" (Brown 193), then the prostitute becomes

its embodiment. The young prostitute in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” does not parade herself around Boston’s streets. Instead, she is located at the centre of a maze: Robin must manoeuvre the city’s labyrinthine streets to find her, turning corners at random and becoming completely disoriented before he happens upon her home, located on a “street of mean appearance [lined with] ill-built houses” (Hawthorne 216). She is one of the first city dwellers with whom he interacts.

She is shrouded in mystery. Robin only happens upon her when he is nearly overcome with hunger and, questioning “the propriety of demanding...the necessary guidance from the first solitary passenger whom he should meet” (216), he allows his body’s needs to take precedence over social decorum. Like Poe’s protagonist, Robin experiences the physical and mental weakness that facilitates his entrance into the city’s underworld that the prostitute inhabits and embodies. Hawthorne leaves it to his readers, however, to discern the woman’s profession, and though she never declares herself to be a prostitute, “Robin [reads] in her eyes what he [does] not hear in her words” (218). Her depravity is visible, and Robin is immediately made uneasy by the “sly freedom” (217) he detects in her eyes. Her suspected independence is motive for suspicion. She has no name and no identity, though her anonymity is hardly comparable to the *flâneur*’s detached social observation. Even when she re-emerges at story’s end as a witness to Major Molineux’s hazing, the lady is without an identity, and is wholly subsumed by the mob. While the *flâneur* is able to maintain his independence within the crowd, the mob engulfs the woman, and Robin only recognizes her as a series of detached, overtly sexualized parts: “he heard a peal of laughter like the ringing of silvery bells; a woman twitched his arm, a saucy eye met his, and he saw the lady of the scarlet petticoat” (229). Her individuality

is compromised once she leaves the precincts of her dwelling, and she becomes little more than an aggregate of recognizable features in an otherwise faceless mob.

Hawthorne relates that she is “a dainty little figure, with a white neck, round arms, and a slender waist, at the extremity of which her scarlet petticoat jutted out over a hoop” (217). The metonymic petticoat becomes the defining feature of the prostitute, the sole marker of her identity, and she is henceforward simply titled “the lady of the scarlet petticoat” (229). Like Baudelaire’s Woman, who is inextricable from the “muslins, the gauzes, the vast, iridescent clouds of stuff in which she develops herself” (Baudelaire 31), Hawthorne’s lady is tied to her garments and she dresses her body as a commodity for the city’s men to consume. Appropriately, the woman defined by her petticoat lives above “a shop for petty commodities” (Hawthorne 217), and Andrew Loman anchors this scene in the economic debates of eighteenth-century Massachusetts, referencing the 1719 pamphlet *The Present Melancholy Circumstances of the Province Consider’d*. In it, the anonymous author rails against the import of expensive European goods, equating the consumption of alcohol with the purchase of “shop goods” (351). Loman argues that the author moralizes against such imports not because they “suggested that the heirs of the Puritan errand were becoming cosmopolitan Europhiles,” but because they threatened American trade and the American economy (351). According to *The Present Melancholy Circumstances*, foreign imports are “needless” and of “no advantage to the public”: rather than benefit the economy, they “tend further to impoverish us” (6). “By dint of her apparent profession and also her residence,” the lady is, in Loman’s words, “linked to the[se] attacks on moral dissipation and extravagance” (351). She is connected not merely to economic transactions, but specifically to superfluous consumption. Poe’s narrator in “The Man of the Crowd” likewise scorns the crude consumerism represented by the prostitute, and in his litany of

street walkers and workers, only the vendors occupy a lower place than the prostitute. She is counted amongst those who transform the street into a mere marketplace. Hawthorne's lady of the scarlet petticoat similarly sells her body as the storeowner sells his trinkets. With a voice "the airy counterpart of a stream of melted silver" (217) and a laugh like the "ringing of silvery bells" (229), imagery which evokes economic transactions, she is merely a part of the excessive urban commercialism that the *flâneur* detests.

While Robin is drawn to the lady's door after he detects "a woman's garment within" (216), she remains in her house, and, claiming that Major Molineux is found inside, does not reveal any knowledge of the city and never offers to map its streets for Robin. Though Robin is, as the narrator notes, "half-willing" to enter the prostitute's home (218), she is framed as a quasi-siren who lures him into potential sexual transgression. Unlike the *flâneur*, she is not in the public realm, instead inviting Robin into her private domain. Hawthorne conflates the public and private spheres, suggesting that the domestic is not, in fact, a hallowed space. The home is instead a site of vice and immorality, and though it is shielded from the public gaze, it is also easily accessed by outsiders. The prostitute is tied to the house, and though she positions herself in her doorway "to observe [Robin] without a corresponding display on her part" (216), her door acts a literal barrier. Unlike the *flâneur*, she is sheltered from view, unable to be observed, and the fear of being seen by the night watchman forces her to "[vanish] speedily into her own domicile" (218) when he appears. The disciplinary gaze is a threat for her, and she must actively remain invisible. Her appearance at Major Molineux's hazing is extraordinary: though she is, in this moment, the ally of the night watchman, the hazing is an example of urban anarchy. She only appears in public when the rules of urban order have been suspended.

Taking readers directly into the prostitute's home, Brown anticipates Hawthorne's subversion of the Victorian notion of a safe domestic sphere. Fallen women are, in fact, ubiquitous in *Arthur Mervyn*, from Clemenza Lodi, to Arthur's own sister, to the Miss Watson of Welbeck's youthful transgressions. The central "fallen women" of the text, however, are Mrs. Villars and her dubious daughters, whose living arrangements parody the traditional family unit: the patriarch has conveniently died, leaving the matriarch to arrange sexual relations for her daughters that in turn produce no children. The women are immediately established as the Other within their society as, "lately arrived from Europe" (Brown 221), they are foreigners in Philadelphia. It must be noted that Europe in 1793 was a site of upheaval in the wake of the French Revolution; with Louis XVI's execution, the year marked the beginning of the Terror in France. As the "widow of an English officer" (221), Mrs. Villars has an indirect tie to European military campaigns. The Villarses are, by extension, implicitly connected to social chaos and political unrest.

The domestic sphere is a "temple of voluptuousness" (320) in *Arthur Mervyn*, and the immorality of its inhabitants is manifested in the physical state of the house: Arthur marks that "an air of negligence and disorder was everywhere visible" (321). These women are hardly angels of the house, but they are not streetwalkers either. Like Robin, who is lured by the lady of the scarlet petticoat, customers must seek out the Villars's house, which is located in "a remote quarter of the city" (220). The women are not obviously visible or easily accessible. Clemenza, for example, is immured in the house, and, as Arthur penetrates into the heart of the brothel to find her, he decries the "Doors and passages between her and [him]" (313). She is separated from him, shielded from his sight and kept from any physical connection to him. Hardly the ubiquitous presence on the streets evoked by the New York *Tribute*, she is virtually impossible to

find. Arthur's first view of Mrs. Villars's daughter likewise comes when he barges into her room, happening upon "Two females, arrayed with voluptuous negligence, in a manner adapted to the utmost seduction, and seated in a careless attitude, on a sofa" (318). They are hidden from view even within the domestic sphere, and, like the lady of the scarlet petticoat, they attempt to remain unseen, shrieking with terror when discovered by Arthur.

Brown explicitly connects the prostitute to commerce and money, though his depiction suggests an intense suspicion of the economically self-sufficient woman that is not as easily discernable in Hawthorne's depiction. The figure of the *flâneur* is marked for his financial security, and his idleness stems from his seemingly never-ending source of income. Mrs. Villars's neighbours, however, grow wary of her when they suspect that her "subsistence was derived not from pension of patrimony, but from the wages of pollution" (221). She is directly contrasted to women like Achsa Fielding and Mrs. Wentworth who procure their income through the acceptable state of widowhood. The only women whom Brown depicts earning their own living, independent of a man's allowance, do so by immoral means. Though Mrs. Villars "stooped to the vilest means of amassing money" (221), she is rich enough to keep two houses, one in Philadelphia and one "in the environs" of the city (222). The prostitute is not specifically a public or urban figure in Brown's depiction, and her geographic liminality reflects the general collapse of the city-country binary that pervades the novel. She has infiltrated both the sacred domestic and rural spheres.

In plague-ridden Philadelphia, however, the domestic sphere and the bodies of the women who maintain it are already thoroughly contaminated. *Arthur Mervyn* is marked by a connection between sickness and corruption, with disease becoming one of the physical manifestations of sexual depravity. The Villars's brothel becomes a literal site of sickness, and

the women flee to their country home when the plague strikes in the city, leaving one of their customers to die in the house. In another parody of domestic felicity, the home is made a locus of illness, a place of moral and physical disintegration. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White extensively discuss the connection between morality and disease in relation to the prostitute (125-148). Noting that the city was both exoticized and framed as “the locus of fear, disgust, and fascination” (125), they suggest a nineteenth-century obsession with the urban abject of which the prostitute was seen as the physical manifestation. The city was mapped to divide the clean areas from the dirty, and designed to segregate the filthy from the middle and upper classes. Their argument suggests that although filth was kept at a distance, its visibility preserved class boundaries while also providing visible proof of the corruption of the poor. Though, as Stallybrass and White note, the poor and criminal “transgress[ed] the boundaries of the ‘civilized’” body (132), their very transgression maintained the bourgeois understanding of exactly what the “civilized body” *should* look like.

The threat of physical corruption was personified by the prostitute, whose body, as Stallybrass and White argue, was conflated with discourses of filth and germs. Disease and crime were linked in the nineteenth century, and the English Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 permitted police to arrest women suspected of having gonorrhoea or syphilis. In America, the New York Society for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases likewise attempted to curb disease by eradicating prostitution (Gilfoyle 185). The prostitute’s body was the symbolic “breeding ground of physical and spiritual germs” (138). Though Stallybrass and White note that the *flâneur*, by dint of his detachment, was—theoretically—never infected with such germs, the prostitute was characterized as the very source of this contamination. Baudelaire and Poe

likewise make clear this connection between prostitution and disease. Describing the hierarchy of prostitutes on the streets of Paris, Baudelaire differentiates between the young and proud courtesans on the one hand and on the other the whores, the “poor slaves” of the “filthy stews” of the city (Baudelaire 37). The whore’s body is a sick body, a consumptive body, or an obese body, subject to “that hideous health of the slothful” (38). Poe’s woman of the town is similarly grotesque, her moral transgressions manifest in her physicality. She is physically dirty, and, describing the young prostitute “burning with a rabid ambition to be ranked the equal of her elders in vice” (401), Poe suggests that she is at once infected and infectious.

Like the bodies of the prostitutes of Poe’s story, Clemenza Lodi’s features begin to match her indiscretions: her “roses had faded, and her brilliance vanished” (324), and she mirrors the wasted and feverish bodies of the yellow plague victims that litter Philadelphia’s streets. According to Mrs. Wentworth, Clemenza is little more than “Welbeck’s prostitute” (Brown 360), despite the fact that she never took money from him in exchange for sex. Brown, however, never uses the word “prostitute” to describe the women in his novel who sell their bodies. As in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” prostitution is merely implied in *Arthur Mervyn*, though, as Mrs. Wentworth’s comment suggests, *any* sexual indiscretion constitutes a version of prostitution. The fallen woman is the sick woman, and the colouring of Clemenza’s face grows “sickly and pale, and in mournful unison with a feeble and emaciated form” (324). Like the prostitutes of Baudelaire’s analysis, Clemenza becomes less feminine as she forfeits her sexual propriety, and the social revulsion toward the prostitute is hardly conducive to a flâneur’s independence and anonymity.

Introduced via and sexualized by men, neither Clemenza, nor the Villarses, nor the lady of the scarlet petticoat is wholly independent, and Maria Archer of *City Crimes* is likewise

assigned an identity by a wandering male protagonist. His self-sufficiency and freedom of movement highlight her stasis and dependence on his potential business. His visibility on his city's streets contrasts her invisibility and segregation from the society that, paradoxically, provides her with customers. Frank Sydney, the protagonist of Thompson's novel, is wandering the streets when he happens upon Maria, a young lady of seemingly good repute. Like Lydia Maria Child, Frank is completely undirected and purposeless in his traversing of New York City, and as he tours the city, he meets the stock characters of the urban underworld. Before he encounters Maria, Frank stumbles upon a thief, and, in an instance of paternalism, pays him on the condition that he abandon his criminal ways thereafter. Though Frank is introduced as a chivalric and moral figure, the interaction demonstrates the importance of money in the city. Property and a respectable family name are of no use to Frank in New York; to survive, he needs tangible cash.

His introduction to a prostitute occurs immediately after this economic transaction. Maria Archer, however, is not visibly depraved, and Frank initially assumes that she is a helpless innocent, a "frail one" (110) in need of assistance. Occupying a "house of humble but respectable exterior"—rather than a "shop for petty commodities"—Maria lures him in rather than actively pursue him. Locating Maria's house on Chatham Street (110), Thompson's city is topographically specific in a way that Hawthorne's is not, and as Frank approaches Maria, she retreats even deeper into her domestic sphere, simultaneously removing him from the street: the narrator describes how she "took him gently by the hand, and drawing him into the entry, closed the door" (110). Unlike Robin in his encounter with the lady of the scarlet petticoat, Frank is unable to resist Maria's sexual charm. Once she leads Frank into her bedroom, she immediately shuts and locks her door. She ends his wandering.

Frank recognizes that prostitutes often “[procure] patronage from such midnight pedestrians as might happen to be passing their doors” (110). These women do not leave their homes, and Maria’s epithet as a “woman of the town” (123) is highly ironic given her apparent inability to move farther than her front door. In his later discussion of the prostitutes found walking along the Boston Common, the narrator immediately characterizes the “brazen-faced courtesan” by her “‘nods, ’ and becks and wreathed smiles” (273), and he similarly notes how the prostitutes in New York “[parade] the streets” (232). While the narrator suggests that these women endeavour to be seen, the prostitutes Thompson describes in *City Crimes* are curiously absent from view, hidden within homes, bars, or taverns, or literally enclosed in the Dark Vaults. Even those who do work on the streets are tied to specific locations, such as Broadway. Thompson’s geography of prostitution corresponds to historical fact. Timothy Gilfoyle notes that New York City was divided into several main sex districts where the majority of brothels were located. The most famous was The Tenderloin, which stretched from Canal Street (near The Battery) to 34th Street in the 1870s, and to 57th Street by the 1890s (203). Like their real-world analogues, literary prostitutes do not wander freely or indiscriminately. They are instead positioned in buildings that simultaneously shield them from the public gaze and offer a fixed location for their liaisons with customers.

By describing Frank’s near mugging as a prelude to his introduction of Maria, Thompson implicates her in a world of seedy commerce. She is inextricable from her possessions, and her clothes ultimately reveal her true persona. Unlike Hawthorne and Brown, however, Thompson provides his readers with a deliciously detailed account of Maria’s physicality, describing how her loose “dressing gown...concealed neither her plump shoulders, nor the two fair and ample globes...that gave her form a luxurious fullness” (111). Moreover, her own home is not only

open for public access, but is also made a site of economic exchange, and like Mrs. Villars and her daughters, Maria and Frederick Archer live in a parodic subversion of the nineteenth-century family unit. Frederick profits from his wife's forced adultery. She "support[s] him in his idleness, by becoming a common prostitute" (122), and he arranges her liaisons, advertising his wife's services and bringing potential customers to their apartment. Though she is the breadwinner for her household, the working woman in *City Crimes*, as in *Arthur Mervyn*, is dismissed as immoral, her chances at salvation refused. Ultimately, Fred murders the woman who financially supports him, and though Maria is hardly vilified to the same extent as the Villarses, her failure to be redeemed suggests a nineteenth-century cultural anxiety surrounding the economically sufficient woman. The women who possess a *flâneur's* wealth in the period's literature are invariably widows or the daughters of wealthy men. Women who procure finances by deviating from this accepted path invariably obtain their money through dishonest means.

If *flânerie* is a practise characterized by independence, autonomy, and freedom of movement, then the literary prostitute is hardly a *flâneuse*. The nineteenth-century American metropolis was becoming increasingly accessible to women, and though the city remained (and, arguably, remains) a highly gendered space, women's access to it was, as figures such as Lydia Maria Child suggest, becoming less restricted. Thus, one might reasonably expect to find a female figure to correspond with the *flâneur*. Critics' arguments that the nineteenth-century prostitute was a female *flâneur*, however, do not correspond with the representations of prostitution in fiction. The prostitute and *flâneur* were undoubtedly similar: social deviants who were extremely familiar with the geography and inner workings of the city, they were at once observers and members of the visual spectacle that comprised the nineteenth-century metropolis. In literary representations of prostitution, however, the woman of the town is morally dubious in

a way that her male counterpart is not, and the contamination and superfluous consumption with which she is associated are at odds with the *flâneur*'s detached, blasé autonomy. The hidden, economically vulnerable, overtly sexed body of the prostitute in Hawthorne's, Brown's, and Thompson's texts stands in stark contrast to the omnipresent, wealthy, and relatively chaste *flâneur*. Hardly a romantic and idle urban rambler, the prostitute in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," *Arthur Mervyn*, and *City Crimes* can never be a *flâneuse*: dispossessed and financially dependent (if stable), she remains in the home, gazing out on the world from which she hides herself.

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