

Eighteenth-Century British Erotica, Part I

Pleasures, Comforts and Plagues of the
Early Eighteenth Century

Edited by
Chris Mounsey and Rictor Norton



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Eighteenth-Century British Erotica

General Editors: Alexander Pettit and Patrick Spedding

Volume 1

Pleasures, Comforts and Plagues
of the Early Eighteenth Century

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH EROTICA

GENERAL EDITORS

Alexander Pettit
Patrick Spedding

VOLUME EDITORS

Barbara M. Benedict
Kevin L. Cope
Chris Mounsey
Rictor Norton
Patrick Spedding

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General Introduction by
Alexander Pettit

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C. M.

General Introduction

The most frequently cited work in this five-volume set is David Foxon's *Libertine Literature in England, 1660–1745*. An early version of Foxon's study appeared in the *Book Collector* in 1963;¹ a revision in book form was published the next year by the Shevna Press (London). The print-run seems to have been small, as one would expect, given the specialized audience of bibliophiles targeted by the press. Flanked by an introduction and an index, *Libertine Literature* was again reissued in 1966 (dated 1965), this time by University Books of New Hyde Park, New York.

The American reissue unblushingly proclaims its affiliation with 1960s counterculturalism. Its packaging helps us understand the cultural status – then, now and much earlier – of what one might call pornography, erotica or libertine literature, with due acknowledgment of the fuzziness of these categories. The publisher's logo (or printer's device, by way of metaphor) is the Egyptian *udjat*, Horus's magically reconstructed eye, symbolizing healing and protection and implying rarified vision. The image appears twice on the dustjacket, once on the spine, and once on the title page. Like the god Horus, the reader is perceptive, 'different' – in context, knowingly countercultural at a time when counterculturalism was still to some extent an intellectual phenomenon. The ironically elitist appeal encoded in the symbol complements the cruder allure conveyed by the reproduction of Foxon's chapter-titles on the front of the dustjacket: 'Aretino's Postures', 'Nicolas Chorier: Satyra Sotadica' and so on. Together, these elements suggest that the press had its own eye on the disaffected and the questing. Presumably the *udjat* and the chapter-titles were enticements to the remnant bohemian habitués of Greenwich Village and the nascent hippie hordes, bound to points west, eager to reject their parents' presumed prurience and in the thrall of an inchoate and largely uncomprehending multiculturalism.² Readers of a certain

1 David Foxon, 'John Cleland and the Publication of the *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*', *Book Collector* 12 (1963): 476–87.

2 A study might profitably be undertaken of the repackaging of works for young people in the 1960s and 1970s. Among my favourites is a classroom edition of Carlyle from the 1970s, the cover of which depicts the author of *Shooting Niagara* in the Peter Maxian manner, grinning weirdly on one face of a free-floating cube, while an ascetic meditates on another. For a theoretical invitation to such a project, rather differently focussed, see George Bornstein, 'What Is the Text of a Poem by Yeats?', in Bornstein and Ralph G. Williams (eds), *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities* (Ann Arbor, 1993), pp. 67–93.

age will recall that during this period the presence of an *ankh* around one's neck at least implied a disinclination to 'wait until marriage'. Sex and ancient Egyptian mysticism sound the right note for this bunch, and one marvels at the press's pluck in pitching Foxon's account of translations, formats, alternate states and pirate editions to an audience of Sybarites.

The back of the dustjacket offers further evidence about the book's intended readership. Here we find the publisher's list of 'Ancient and Modern Classics'. The only 'classic' likely to be familiar to modern readers, excepting of course the inevitable *I Ching* ('it is believed to hold the key to all Chinese philosophy', 'over the centuries it has...proved itself most reluctant to yield all its secrets'), is *Le Morte Darthur* [*sic*]. The proffered edition is concessive in its preference for modernized spelling ('to make it easily readable') but proud of its representation of 'the complete, unexpurgated text', as though a spin through Malory might be just the thing for fans of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Cancer* and *Naked Lunch*.

The modern authors on the list are academics or gentleman scholars, often prolific but now largely forgotten. The quality of their work is not at issue here; what interests me is the amalgamated nature of the book-list and the manner in which the press presented the list to its public. Comprising, in addition to Foxon's entry, two first editions¹ and several reprints from the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, the list is a storehouse of transhistorical counterculturalism, a naive if ambitious stab at a new canon – 'Modern Classics'! – for a new age.

Among the moderns is the felicitously named G. Legman, whose *Horn Book* is an analysis of sexual symbolism. An apparent onomastic cognate, Frances Legge, contributes *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, 'written in 1915 but kept out of print for many years by neo-orthodox prejudices...now available to readers eager for the truth'.² Vern Bullough's *History of Prostitution*, Charles William Heckethorn's *Secret Societies of All Ages & Countries* and Lewis Spence's *Encyclopedia of Occultism* promise thrills of the Kraft-Ebbing and Malcolm Cowley varieties. Of Charles Godfrey Leland's *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling*, we learn this:

The author was a founder and first president of the Gypsy Lore Society. This is the last of his gypsy works, first published when he was almost seventy, a twenty years' harvest of spells, superstitions, customs, ceremonies, fetishes, usages, exorcisms, incantations and love philtres – vulgar and vile,

1 The first editions are *The Horn Book* (1964) and *The History of Prostitution* (1964).

2 The copy is technically correct but somewhat misleading: the work was published by Cambridge University Press in 1915.

amusing and bemusing – garnered from living sources throughout Europe, the East and America.

What a cornucopia of alternatives to post-war, pre-boomer bourgeois boorishness! As the trombones and washboards of skiffle surrender to the electric sitars and fuzz basses of psychedelia and as the pie-in-the-face, trip-on-the-rug goofiness of screwball comedy yields to the studied sobriety of the French New Wave, the works of Legman and Legge, *et alii*, launch an offensive against (in particular) the Christian canon. Or so University Books would have its readers think.

Foxon's exemplary and durable study may seem at odds with dotty ephemera like *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling*, but it actually performs an important function on the list. *Libertine Literature* (and *Le Morte D'Arthur* and the *I Ching*) constitutes the respectable end of a spectrum that encompasses works of less rigour and substance but more generalist appeal. *Gypsy Sorcery* and *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity* represent the other end point; *The Horn Book*, *The History of Prostitution* and *An Encyclopedia of Occultism* lean closer to Foxon's entry. The extremes cooperate: *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling* enhances *Libertine Literature*'s counter-cultural appeal, and *Libertine Literature* helps *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling* pass as a scholarly or high-cultural product.

And so it was in the eighteenth century. In 1718, the printer and bookseller Edmund Curll published an omnibus edition of Giles Jacob's *Tractatus de Hermaphroditis: or, A Treatise of Hermaphrodites*, an ogling account of lesbian (i.e., 'hermaphrodite') intimacy, and *A Treatise of the Use of Flogging in Venereal Affairs*, a translation from the Latin of a strained send-up dating from 1639 and principally concerned with kidneys. The works are in one sense antithetical to one another, rather as one might suspect that a bibliographical disquisition and an account of 'spells, superstitions, customs, ceremonies, fetishes, usages, exorcisms, incantations and love philtres – vulgar and vile' would be. Jacob's book represents the dominant strain of pornography, then as now: female 'transgression' is first put on display for a male reader or viewer, then punished narratively, thus reinforcing woman's position as an object for the delectation of, and ultimately at the mercy of, a consumerist patriarchy.¹ *A Treatise of the Use of Flogging*, however, exemplifies what Peter Wagner calls 'para-medical literature',² a genre characterized by its faux-

1 For a consideration of this relationship, particularly with respect to several of the publications by Curll reprinted in vol. ii of this set, see Alexander Pettit, 'Rex v. Curll: Pornography and Punishment in Court and on the Page', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 34.1 (2001): 63–78.

2 Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (London, 1988), p. 8.

scientific discussion of (usually) proctological and gynecological pathologies and by its interest in sexual dysfunction – works that pointedly are *not* interested in the narrative representation of sexual performance. *A Treatise*'s Latin origin lends cultural cache to the venereal work, as of course does the Latin title of the *Tractatus de Hermaphroditis* itself.

The roster of books available at Curll's shop at the 'Dial and Bible' on the Strand makes the point more broadly. The list that appears after *The Pleasures of Coition* (1721) in volume two of the present series includes editions, usually pirates, of ancients like Ovid and Theocritus, as well as editions of respectable moderns like Addison, Rowe and Boileau. One also finds edgier entries like a scandalous memoir of Delarivier Manley (including 'an Account of the most considerable Amours in the Court of King *Charles* the Second'), a collection of Jane Barker's amatory fiction, some purplish poems, and a *Compleat History of Magick, Sorcery, and Witchcraft* that might have done well with University Books. Unadvertised and more plainly prurient works like Jacob's *Tractatus* could be had chez Curll as well, as could, 3 years later, the best and most notorious erotic work before John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure: Robert Samber's translation of Jean Barrin's Venus in the Cloister; or, The Nun in Her Smock*. With its cut-rate editions of 'classics ancient and modern' and its pseudo-science, novels, bad plays and pornography, Curll's shop makes much the same point as University Books's list does: the 'low' and the 'high' exist symbiotically. Indeed, the apparent contrast between Foxon's subject and his method – and the actual contrast between the work and its packaging – illustrates the phenomenon in miniature, so to speak. It is a perfect title for University Books, and Curll no doubt would have approved of its marketing.

By excluding the 'high' or at least the comparatively polite and the transparently pretentious, *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica* participates in the on-going and much-remarked process of rounding out the literary or para-literary canon. This is not to deny that recontextualizing 'low' works recodes these works culturally. In this set, for example, one will find the *Tractatus de Hermaphroditis* but not its one-time companion, *A Treatise of the Use of Flogging*. The loss of synthetic meaning is unfortunate but unavoidable. Selectivity is an essential aspect of any editorial project, and no press could justify the inclusion of, say, a hack-edition of Shakespeare in a series titled *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica*. Nor would any press publish a mega-volume series titled *Curll's Shop*. Such an undertaking, however, would not be absurd from a theoretical perspective. Most scholars these days are quick to recognize the broader 'contexts' of high-canonical materials and thereby to appreciate the shortcomings of

blinker and belletristic models of the period. Similarly, readers of these reprints should be mindful of the cultural mix from which the materials have been extracted. This is the backroom of a large and crowded shop, a discrete space, perhaps, but not an isolated one.

The present volume and its four successors comprise the first instalment of *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica*. At least five more volumes are forthcoming. We have taken 'eighteenth century' literally, or nearly so: to identify the period 1700–1800 rather than the 'long' period that dilates to include the latter part of the seventeenth century and the earlier part of the nineteenth. This decision has caused the principals some regrets but is justified, we think, by the profusion of materials available in the eighteenth century proper.

Patrick Spedding has borne the primary responsibility for selecting titles for these volumes, although some of the contributors to individual volumes have offered suggestions as well. The inevitable contextual circumscription notwithstanding, the range of the volumes is extensive. This means that the contents are harder to characterize; and all of us involved in the project recognize the inadequacy of the word 'erotica' to identify works, like those that constitute the tabloidish 'Rabbit Woman' series (volume v) and like most of the entries in the polemical 'fifteen comforts' series (volume i), that presumably never have and never will quicken a pulse. 'Pornography' and other pithy alternatives are no better. Even away from the constraints of a title page, we can probably hope for nothing more specific than 'works in one way or another related to sexual behaviour and/or defecation, or to the parts of the body associated with these functions'.¹ Given the tendency in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century criticism to blur or efface generic boundaries, such descriptive bagginess, however plodding, may be appropriate. Certainly this description has the advantage of highlighting the corporeality of these works (along with the possible disadvantage of not distinguishing them from certain works by, for example, Swift and Pope). Not the least of the benefits of reintroducing this material may be the provision of hard data to a generation of critics fascinated by 'the body' but unaware of the imaginative works most intimately concerned with it.

Mr Spedding has grouped the entries according to chronology and theme: early-century discussions of matrimony, followed by examples of

1 Of course the history of erotic literature has been marked by debates about the definition of erotic literature, legal and critical. This is not the place to recap the debate. Wagner addresses the problem by positing a series of smallish categories under the super-category of pornography: para-medical literature, anti-Catholic literature and so on. The approach is in some ways restrictive, but it meaningfully emphasizes the polyvalence or even the protean nature of the 'genre'.

the popular 'fifteen'-genre, enumerating the 'comforts', 'plagues' and 'pleasures' of marriage and other forms of socio-sexual commingling (volume i); a medley of comparatively graphic early- to mid-century didactic and 'scientific' works, mostly printed by Curll, including the *Tractatus de Hermaphroditis* and *Venus in the Cloister* (volume ii); works variously concerned with developing erotic themes through the use of botanical, somatic and geographical metaphors, including several pieces from the Rabelaisian sci-fi-sex series concerning 'Merryland' (volume iii); John Wilkes's notorious *Essay on Woman* (1763) and a miscellany of other late-century works (volume iv); and works from the first half of the century that focus, in the words of the volume's compiler, on 'the erotic exploitation of medical and legal discourses', including Henry Fielding's *The Female Husband* (1746) and several accounts of the 'Rabbit Woman' controversy of 1726–7 (volume v). Only a handful of the works included in these volumes have been reprinted since the eighteenth century.

The texts have been reproduced as carefully as possible. In several instances, the tightness of the original bindings has resulted in a slight loss of text. Marginalia from the original texts have been removed unless, in the volume editor's opinion, they merit commentary. In addition to the reprinted texts, each volume includes an introduction, more narrowly focussed individual headnotes and notes to the texts. Brief publication histories begin most headnotes; texts are identified at the end of each of them. In the notes to the texts, we have not glossed words defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or explicated references that will be clear to the specialists for whom these volumes are intended. Slang words, however, are often glossed. A cumulative index appears at the end of the fifth volume.

Our decision to reprint these works in facsimile rather than newly to edit them was based in part on commercial expediency and in part on our belief that the often execrable physical status of these works constitutes part of their cultural meaning.¹ A glance at the endnotes for the present volume is instructive. Here, Chris Mounsey and Rictor Norton record the correct forms of quite a few compositorial errors, thereby clarifying passages garbled in the originals. The high incidence of error – less characteristic of printed works in the period the closer one moves toward the mainstream, to generalize – suggests that such gaffes in some sense

1 Editorial theorists continue to turn a cold shoulder to 'marginal' texts. But for an argument for the value of retaining visual markers of cultural 'difference' in editions, specifically classroom editions, see J. Paul Hunter, 'Editing for the Classroom: Texts in Contexts', *Studies in the Novel* 27 (1995): 284–94.

contribute to these (impalpable) works as certainly as they characterize these (physical) texts. They affirm the works' lowly status. Drawing-room folios dress for company; closet octavos do not and need not do so.¹

One of the pieties of contemporary textual studies holds that any editorial intervention, including reformatting, rebinding and so on, violates the presumed sanctity of the original text. The claim is to some extent axiomatic: different quantities differ. It may be that this revolutionary if unimaginative tenet applies most meaningfully to texts, like these, most obviously affected by the circumstances of their production. The profusion of error might constitute an argument for the retention of error.

Whether or not this postulate is compelling, I and my colleagues are pleased to present works that proclaim their lack of compositorial *politesse* along with their other oddities and their many delights. These works were the unacknowledged substratum of Enlightenment literature, and readers may now examine them more or less as they would have been available for examination in the eighteenth century, the irony of a pricy hard-bound set of supposedly fugitive writings notwithstanding. Unlike the copy-writers of University Books, we do not need to pretend that these works are or should be 'classics'; and in any case our own cultural moment requires a less covert assertion of the belief that 'classics' (however construed) do not exist in Parnassian isolation from ruder parts of the verbal record. Most fundamentally, we hope that the reappearance of these works will stimulate new thought and scholarship, concerning the works themselves as well as the better-remembered publications with which they jostled for attention in their own day.

For their good-will and assistance in this project, I thank Pat Spedding, Rictor Norton, Kevin Cope, Rebecca Sayers Hanson, Jacqueline Vanhoutte, M. R. and Sidney Schtink, and, at Pickering & Chatto, Mark Pollard, James Powell, Julia Benest and their amiable colleagues.

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Alexander Pettit

¹ This does not mean that these works were 'marginal' from a commercial perspective. Some sold quite well, as various headnotes in the series indicate.



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Introduction

We begin this series of volumes of eighteenth-century erotica with a focus on the perennial topics in the study of bawdy literature: sex, law and – bibliography.¹ Most of the authors in this volume were unknown hacks working in the narrow world of Grub Street, and it seems clear that they read each other's pamphlets as soon as they were printed, and rushed to publish their own 'answers' before the novelty faded and the market turned to the next fashion. The pattern of publication is very 'grub-streetish': one hit, endlessly reworked to catch a penny. The 'production values' of some of these pamphlets were very bad. Printing errors in every other line suggest either dyslexic compositors or, more likely, the speed with which the compositors worked: a day to read someone else's work, a day to imitate or parody it, a day to print it. Half a dozen of the selections in this volume form an interrelated group that was probably written during a few months in 1706–7. The medieval name of Grub Street was Gropecuntlane: it seems somehow appropriate that an area noted for sexual prostitution should become noted for literary prostitution, or hackwork.

Nearly all the selections in this volume are bawdy in the literal sense: they deal with the life of bawds and whores. It must be admitted, however, that they are not quite erotic in the modern sense of stimulating the sexual arousal of the reader. One work (*An Answer to The Pleasures of a Single Life* (1701)) does refer to erotic books as aids to masturbation – 'Your bawdy Books, your silent Comfort be' – but most bawdy books, at least at the beginning of the eighteenth century, probably produced in their readers only a generalized, jovial pleasure and merry conviviality rather than something as narrowly focused as full arousal. (It is also true, of course, that the titillation threshold has risen greatly in the ensuing three centuries.) Overt sexual descriptions are absent except in *The London-Bawd: With Her Character and Life* (1699/1700?) and *A Full and True Account of a Dreadful Fire That Lately Broke Out in the Pope's Breeches* (1713). The works do, however, contain numerous descriptions of sexual desire, the trade of prostitution, the sores and symptoms of venereal disease, and the world of fornication or unbridled sexual pleasure. All

¹ Most of our bibliographical remarks, here and in the headnotes, rely heavily upon D. F. Foxon, *English Verse, 1701–1750* (Cambridge, 1975).

this is contained within a moral framework – usually ironic, but sometimes half-serious – warning readers of the dangers of debauchery. Only *The Choice, or, The Pleasures of a Country-Life* (1700), by John Pomfret, and *The Ladies Choice* (1702) can be classified as ‘polite literature’: the rest of the works herein describe either ‘low life’ with a coarse realism, or sexual life, which, however natural and universal, was deemed to be ‘stuff not fit to be mentioned publicly’ – two of the features characteristic of bawdy, according to early eighteenth-century conceptions.

The period covered by the works in this volume – the last couple of years of the reign of King William and the reign of Queen Anne (1702–14) – forms a kind of interregnum between the more openly salacious and lubricious pornography of the earlier Restoration and the later Georgian period. The libertine court of Charles II, when John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester and Sir Charles Sedley wrote openly about sex and even used the word ‘fuck’, was 15 years in the past by 1700. During the brief reign inaugurated by Charles’s death in 1685, James II had attempted to improve the moral climate of the court. William and Mary proved to be more high-minded still, although rumours circulated about sexual scandals in their court. Libertinism was out of fashion by the beginning of the new century. The benefits of a morally self-regulating populace seemed clearer than they had since the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

Many of the works that we reproduce use satire and irony to subvert the new moral temper of the times. Two of the works – *The Constables Hue and Cry after Whores and Bawds* (1700?) and *The London-Bawd* – refer specifically to the Society for the Reformation of Manners, a moral reform movement that campaigned against bawdy publications for 40 years. The Society was formed in Tower Hamlets, a borough of London, in 1690.¹ The Society attempted to institute a network of moral guardians by placing four stewards in each ward of the city and two in each parish. It circulated documents designed to help citizens ensnare (or ‘trepan’) prostitutes, pimps, bawds and sodomites. *A Help to a National Reformation* (1700), for example, reprints an abstract of the ‘Penal-Laws against Prophaneness and Vice’, together with a form for writing a warrant for the arrest of offenders against these laws, a blank warrant, and rules for giving information to magistrates. The volume concludes with a ‘Specimen of an Agreement for the Forming of a *Society for the Reformation of Manners* in any City, Town or Village of the Kingdom, where there

1 See Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700–1800* (London, 1992), pp. 44–52; and E. J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977).

are but *Three* or *Four* Pious Persons that are willing to unite in such a *Society*' (p. D4v).

The Society – though it is strictly more accurate to refer to 'Societies' in the plural, as the branches were not organized from the centre – included among its members morally zealous churchmen who delivered 'improving' sermons. Thomas Bray's *For God or for Satan* (1708) is a fine example of their hellfire rhetoric. Bray attacks sinners 'who assemble themselves by Troops into Harlot Houses, and there dissolve themselves in Rioting and Drunkenness, in Chambering and Wantonness' (p. 14). And the Society had influential supporters amongst the judiciary and in the government. On 24 February 1697, a law against lewd behaviour was instituted, calling for

Punishment of all Persons who shall be Guilty of Excessive Drinking, Blasphemy, Prophane Swearing and Cursing, Lewdness, Prophanation of the Lord's Day, or other Dissolute, Immoral or Disorderly Practices, as they will answer it to Almighty God, and upon Pain of our Highest Displeasure.

Not only Parliament but also the Church supported the Society's extreme position. John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury, in a sermon against the lasciviousness of the theatre, noted that his comments were 'of equal Force against Lascivious Books'. An excerpt condemning such books was reprinted in the *Post-Man* for 5–7 May 1706, at the height of the 'Fifteen Comforts' craze that is amply represented in the present volume.

A major reason why the Society was formed was to suppress bawdy-houses, because prostitutes were believed to be spreading venereal disease throughout the local population. This perception was probably accurate. A modern social historian has noted that 'between 1710 and 1749, at least 15 per cent of the women who sought divorces in the London Consistory Court claimed that their husbands had been venereally infected'. In the later eighteenth century, when records can be analysed statistically, 'it was not unusual for 20 to 40 per cent of British sailors to be venereally infected'.¹ Condoms, which were used for protection from disease rather than for contraception, were available in London from 1701 and were common by 1717.² John Dunton in *The Nightwalker; or Evening Rambles in Search of Lewd Women* (1696–7) describes a meeting with a prostitute who was well aware of the disease, and was careful about the men with whom she chose to have sex. The eponymous

1 Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution* (Chicago, 1998), pp. 199, 201.

2 See Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 203.

narrator of *The London-Bawd* is afraid of becoming a common night-walker, the lowest rank in the trade, who not only attracts the lowest fees but also has the highest risk of danger, including danger of infection. The Bawd therefore sets up her own house, where she ensures that only women free from venereal disease are admitted, and she even has physicians on special call to attend to them straightaway if they catch the clap. Such arrangements are not documented in historical records, but venereal disease is frequently mentioned throughout this volume, with as much humour as the authors can muster.

The Society for the Reformation of Manners claimed in 1726 that ‘the total Number of Persons prosecuted by the *Societies* in or near *London* only, for *Debauchery* and *Prophaneness*, for thirty-four Years last past, are calculated at 91,899’.¹ These figures are exaggerated, but the Society may have been responsible for the arrests of more than 20,000 prostitutes (and other ‘lewd and disorderly persons’, including sodomites) during its period of operation. Five of its published records of arrests survive for the period covered by this volume: their members arrested 791 prostitutes in 1700, 820 in 1701, 805 in 1702, 890 in 1704, and 651 in 1707.² Arrests of prostitutes significantly declined after 1730, when the Society became inactive. Its members had been criticized for being over-zealous and hypocritical almost since its inception. For example, the Society was lampooned in *The Constables Hue and Cry after Whores and Bawds*, reproduced here, which prints a fake offer of a reward (the offspring of a tomcat for the next 7 years) to trepanners of whores and bawds, while reproducing the names and addresses of several prostitutes, probably for the use of visitors to London.

The London-Bawd, which contains a very accurate and non-satiric portrayal of a Reforming Constable (see esp. pp. 319–29), is especially interesting for the light it sheds on the history of sexuality, specifically sexual practices, prostitution and ordinary people’s attitudes to sexuality. Contrary to the claims of modern social historians influenced by the theorizing of Michel Foucault, all the works in this volume, not least *The London-Bawd*, demonstrate a clear understanding of the concept of sexual orientation and a clear understanding that sexual desire lay near the core of one’s being. The view of the author – who presumably is a man, rather than ‘the Bawd’ herself – is not only that sex is natural and pleasurable, but that having lots of it is also natural and pleasurable: ‘Nature

1 *The One and Thirtieth Account of the Progress Made in the Cities of London and Westminster* (1726), quoted in Donald Thomas, *A Long Time Burning: The History of Literary Censorship in England* (London, 1969), p. 75.

2 See Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 112.

that has given us Appetites, has also given us an Inclination to satisfie 'em; and 'tis no more than the Satisfying the Natural Desires and Inclinations of Men and Women that I concern my self about' (pp. 279–80). Further, 'Concupiscential Appetites' are stronger in some people than in others, 'and therefore Married People are not so much to blame in making use of others besides their Wives or Husbands' (p. 280). This argument is not expressed with the deliberately provocative polemic of libertinism yet is perhaps all the more subversive for its very naturalness. If any 'medicalization of sexuality' has occurred, it occurred far earlier than in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the Bawd's argument may be prompted by the new physiological (hence non-moral) discourse of the late seventeenth-century sex guides such as *Aristotle's Master-piece, or The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Parts Thereof* (1684) or Nicolas Venette's *Tableau de l'amour conjugal* (1686).¹ Such guides seem to lay behind the frank recognition that 'they that are unmarried...doubtless have the same desires that married People have: Nay, their Desires are generally more impetuous; for finding of their Natural Concupiscence stirring 'em up to a desire of Copulation, they apprehend that there's more in't then what they find, when once they come to try' (p. 284). The argument against loose morals is characterized as being humorously provincial rather than cosmopolitan: '*but we in the Country think 'tis a Wicked thing to lye with Folks, unless they are Married; and then they mun be married but to one nother*' (p. 311).

Our historical knowledge of early-modern sexual behaviour suggests that the Bawd's attitude was almost the norm. The puritan moral inhibitions and mechanisms of social control had collapsed, which 'led to an explosion of pre-nuptial pregnancies and bastardies'.² For example, the rate of bastardy in first births rose steadily, from 6 per cent in 1690 to 20 per cent in 1790, and by the late eighteenth century 'a third of all brides were pregnant on their wedding-day, and over half of all first births were conceived out of wedlock'.³

Many people in the lower classes never officially married under licence but just lived with one another in a kind of serial concubinage. Social historians may be correct that the usual pattern was for a maid-servant to have sex only with the beau who had promised to marry her, and that bastardy was not due to promiscuity. However, records show that of the 373 women who had bastards in the parish of St Margaret's,

1 See Rictor Norton, *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica*, vol. v. pp. vii–viii.

2 Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England, 1660–1753* (Oxford, 1992), p. 11.

3 Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, p. 17.

Westminster, between 1712 and 1721, one-third (137) did not know their partner on the first occasion of having sex with him, but had been picked up in the street and taken to a disreputable public house either in their neighbourhood or in Covent Garden.¹

The reasons given by the Bawd for a married woman seeking a brisk young lad outside of marriage are difficult to document from historical records: her case is basically that young men are mere fumlbers and that old men are impotent. And, more importantly, husbands are brutal – well illustrated by the first story (chap. 3), in which a husband beats and humiliates his wife and then cuts off her nose (or rather, as it transpires, he cuts off the nose of the bawd posing as his wife). Many divorce cases in fact document ‘the peculiar brutality of marital relationships in the period 1690 to 1710’.² A high level of violence in the sexual relations between men and women during this period has been documented; for example, from 1700 to 1709 there were 20 cases in the London Consistory Court in which women sought divorce from husbands who regularly beat them.³

The Bawd’s account of the typical life of a prostitute is accurate in some respects, though she ignores the more painful and sordid aspects of being on the game. A study of the *Sessions Papers* shows that 10 to 15 per cent of the women rounded up by the constables and subsequently convicted had been convicted many times during careers lasting about 10 years.⁴ But about 40 per cent of those arrested were immediately discharged (hence do not appear in conviction records), so the core of ‘hardened’ prostitutes is likely to have been higher than 15 per cent. The number of women who shifted back and forth between prostitution and respectable labour – recognized by Dunton in *The Night-Walker*, and by Daniel Defoe, who in *Everybody’s Business Is Nobody’s Business* (1725) referred to this ‘amphibious life’⁵ – is unquantifiable, though some social historians suggest it was so high as to be the norm. However, most prostitutes when not on the game worked as milliners, and most milliners were prostitutes, to the extent that this occupation was widely regarded as just a cover for prostitution. If a ‘mantua-maker’ appeared in court as a character witness for a prostitute before the bar, the judge smiled knowingly.

1 See Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, pp. 118–19.

2 Stone, *Uncertain Unions*, p. 35.

3 See Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 329.

4 See Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 115.

5 See Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 119.

To judge by trial records, it was very common in the rougher parts of London for streetwalkers to simply assault and steal from potential clients without actually having sex with them. Prostitutes kept an eye out for drunkards, whom they could easily roll. Prostitution was essentially a trade in stolen watches. During 1710–20 Jonathan Wild and Mary Miliner followed the trade of ‘buttock and twang’, i.e. whore and bully. A whore would jostle a pick-up in the street, her bully would rush up to accuse the man of indecency, or even attack him, and in the ensuing confusion the whore would rush off with the booty. A typical story, from later in the century, is that of Ann Duck. She began work as a servant in a bawdy-house, then became an independent streetwalker and pick-pocket. Usually she paired up with another woman to walk the street. They would pick up a man, take him to an upstairs room of a house regularly used with the connivance of the landlady, throw him on the bed and rob him, then stamp on the floor as a prearranged signal to call up their bully, who would rush into the room pretending the women were his wife and sister, threaten to beat up the cully for debauching them, and throw him out of the house. She spent time in most of the prisons of London, and together with two of her female colleagues was hanged for a violent assault resulting in death in 1744.¹

In London there were no ‘red-light’ districts as there were in the main cities of Europe, where the sexual underworld was partly regulated and kept away from public view. Instead, most of London’s major thoroughfares as well as its dark corners were thronged with sexually aggressive women who would not let a gentleman pass without grabbing at him to ask for a ‘treat’. The more common bawd of semi-organized prostitution was a landlady of a public house or coffee house where prostitutes brought their customers and robbed them, and she earned her living by fencing stolen goods. They were accurately called ‘disorderly houses’ and were frequented by thieves and housebreakers quick to erupt into violent quarrels. Contrary to the Marxist/postmodern view that prostitution was an integral and accepted part of working-class communities, local householders and merchants were invariably dismayed to discover that there was a notorious bawdy-house in their district, which threatened regular commerce and made the area unsafe. Local residents did not prosecute or testify against houses notorious for being frequented by footpads, pickpockets and whores because of fear of retaliatory damage against them or their own premises. Sailors frequently tore down bawdy-houses because they were so regularly fleeced and cheated in them.

¹ See *Sessions Papers* for 17–19 Oct. 1744, no. viii; and the *Ordinary’s Account* of those executed at Tyburn on 7 November 1744.

The bagnios (which sometimes really did offer hot and cold baths) of Covent Garden were on a higher and more regulated level. These again were basically houses of assignation (rather than our vision of a many-roomed, exquisitely furnished 'brothel' reserved solely for sex), where the proprietress often earned more by presiding over a gaming house than from organized prostitution. They became sufficiently fashionable for young girls to be seduced by the 'glamorous' life that they seemed to offer. The great flowering – if that is the correct word – of brothels occurred in the late 1720s and 30s, later than the period covered by this volume, though stews and bordellos are known from the fifteenth century onwards. They were often located outside the old City walls, and south of the Thames in Southwark, though Covent Garden was becoming noted for such houses from the late seventeenth century. Madam Cresswell (c. 1625–84), who is mentioned in *The London-Bawd*, catered to the upper classes and even had a network of agents scouring Amsterdam and other foreign cities to keep her bagnios well stocked. However, most of the bawds in this volume are portrayed as working for private clients, arranging liaisons or even marriages, and might better be described as pimps or panders than as bawds, deriving from a literary tradition going back to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. They also differ from most real-life bawds in that their primary customers are often women, dissatisfied with their husbands. There is little historical evidence that this kind of 'personal trainer' arrangement was common.

Several works in this volume are related from a woman's point of view (some claiming, probably falsely, to be written by women). Women are often treated as the equals of men, and women's sexual desires are shown to be as important and pressing as men's. The argument is usually a consideration of the pros and cons of the married and unmarried state, rather than simply a debate about men versus women. As in the seventeenth century, marriage in early eighteenth-century England was usually delayed to a decade after puberty (to age 26–28 for men and 24–26 for women), which was higher than in other northern European countries. Since families were begun later, the population of Britain remained stagnant while it was increasing in other countries.¹ The low fertility rate was compounded by the probability that around 20 per cent of the population never married and many people never had children. The population of London grew rapidly, but this was by immigration from the countryside. The 'stagnation' of the kingdom was perceived by some to be a danger,

1 See Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 26.

particularly in face of the high birth rates in Roman Catholic countries that threatened England. Many of the pamphlets in this volume, though largely satirical, nevertheless had this serious public concern in the background. Their authors were genuinely eager to give 'Encouragements for all Single Persons of both Sexes to Marry as soon as ever they can get Wives and Husbands', as the title page of *The Batchelors and Maids Answer to The Fifteen Comforts of Matrimony* (1706?) framed the point.

The first group of works in this collection are *The Pleasures of a Single Life, or, The Miseries of Matrimony* (1701); Pomfret's *The Choice* (1700); *An Answer to The Pleasures of a Single Life: or, The Comforts of Marriage Confirm'd and Vindicated* (1701); and *The Ladies Choice* (1702).¹ These are in many ways 'responses' to Edward (Ned) Ward's *Pleasures of Matrimony*, which was printed by Henry Rhodes in 1689 and which reached its fifth edition in 1695. It is tempting to believe that Ward (1667–1731) – the most prolific and best hack writer of his generation – was also the author of *The Pleasures of a Single Life*, but that attribution is unsafe (see headnote, and further discussion below). The author of this poem, pretending to a philosophical even-temperedness, reveals himself as a fervent misogynist. He sings the joys of living a retired life in the country, reading good books, conversing with a circle of familiar friends – all attractive ideals, but possible only for a bachelor. He wishes, above all things, that he were unmarried so he could enjoy life to the full. John Pomfret (1667–1702) in *The Choice*, like his predecessors in the country-villa tradition, advocates a life of moderation with respect to wealth, diet and drinking, and all-male conviviality. As for women, Pomfret allows the occasional company of a 'Witty Nymph' who lives nearby: she would be companionable, faithful, intelligent, fearless, wise, and a capable housekeeper and entertainer – but would not be allowed into the big house. Both poems were popular, and they were frequently printed together throughout the eighteenth century.

The challenge is taken up by *An Answer to The Pleasures of a Single Life*, which argues that marriage is ordained by Heaven and warns that only 'lawful Wedlock sport' will keep men safe from venereal disease and the attendant dangers of frequenting prostitutes. The ambiguous sins of Sodom are condemned, and women are praised for raising men from a state of beastliness. The more literary work, *The Ladies Choice*, cast as a female response to these poems, surveys the kinds of men a woman should avoid for love or marriage.

1 The first two of these works were published together in 1708; the present volume reprints that joint edition.

A more complex set of replies and imitations makes up the next group of poems: the 'Fifteen Comforts' group, from *The Fifteen Comforts of Matrimony: or, Looking-glass for All Those Who Have Enter'd in That Holy and Comfortable State* (1706) to *The Fifteen Pleasures of a Virgin* (1709).¹ These all derive from a common ancestor: *Fifteen Comforts of Rash and Inconsiderate Marriage, or Select Animadversions upon the Miscarriages of a Wedded State*, published in 1681. This was 'Done out of French': the work was a translation of *Les quinze joies de mariage*, attributed to Antoine de La Sale (1385–1460?), a page in the French court and secretary to Louis III.² La Sale's work was a profane parody of the medieval devotional work *Les xv. ioyes nostre dame* (*The Fifteen Joys of the Virgin*), which was often included in books of hours. The *Fifteen Comforts of Rash and Inconsiderate Marriage* was 'answered', allegedly by 'A Person of Quality of the Female Sex', by *Fifteen Real Comforts of Matrimony*, published in 1683 by Benjamin Alsop and Thomas Malthus.³ In these seventeenth-century works we find all the characters that people the eighteenth-century 'Fifteen Comforts' group: whores, cuckolds, scolds, husbands drained of vigour and wealth by their wives or mistresses, young sparks infected with venereal disease, wives too insatiable to be satisfied by their husbands.

Another important source, seldom discussed, is *The Comforts of Whoring and The Vanity of Chastity*, published in two editions in 1694 and ending with 'A Poem In Praise of the Pox'. A typical passage observes that the 'Lady of Pleasure... lives by the Complacent motion of her *Rump* and *Buttocks*' (p. 11) and that the best customer of 'Town Ladies' is 'a hopeful Youth, about Twenty One, with a full Pocket, an Empty Noddle, and a wide Codpiece' (p. 14). The distribution of this book can be seen in a comment in Ned Ward's *The London Spy* for May 1699:

We enter'd this Debtors Garrison [White Friars], where, till of late, says my Friend, Old Nick broach'd all his Wicked Inventions: making this Place the very Theatre of Sin, where the most Choice Villanies were dayly represented. As we pass'd thro' the Gate-way, I observed a stall of Books, and the first that I glanc'd my Eye upon, happen'd to be dignified and dis-

1 We have reproduced all the works in this group, even though some are so tightly bound that some text disappears into the gutter, because they are very rare: only two extant copies are known for most of them, and some survive in only a unique copy.

2 Only the fourth edition (1694) of the translation has been reported; the exact date of the late-medieval French text has not been determined, and the attribution to La Sale is not firm.

3 This response may also have been translated from the French: its preface is signed 'Votre Bonne Amie & Tres-humble servante'. No French version has been reported, however. Malthus, according to Dunton, emigrated to Holland in 1685 in 'perplex circumstances'. See Roger Tompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears* (London, 1979), pp. 51, 95, 111–12.

tinguish'd by this venerable Title, *The Comforts of Whoring, and the vanity of Chastity, Together with a Poem in Praise of the Pox*. Bless me! Thought I, sure this Book was Printed in Hell, and Writ by the Devil; for what Diabolically Scribler upon Earth could be the Author, of such unparalleled Impudence? (p. 7)

What scribbler indeed? This is the only book mentioned by title in *The London Spy*: we might infer that Ward is calling our attention to it because he himself is the author. But it never appeared among his acknowledged works, and this attribution, like many others, remains speculative.

If Ward did not write *The Comforts of Whoreing*, then he plagiarized it when he reworked *The Pleasures of Matrimony* as *The Whole Pleasures of Matrimony* ('Written by E. W. Gent' (1710?)) and added a concluding poem entitled 'The Destructive Miseries of Whoring and Debauchery, of All Its Dreadful Concomitants', in which the forty-eight pages of prose of *The Comforts of Whoreing* are condensed into twelve pages of rhyming verse couplets. The first five chapter titles of *The Comforts of Whoreing* are reproduced as the headings of the five sections of 'The Miseries of Whoring', and other changes in the phrasing of the text are very slight. For example, in *The Comforts of Whoreing* 'the pritty Miss' of a 'genteel' background, when she grows older 'takes Lodgings in Salisbury-Court and sets up the old Trade of Basket-making' (p. 8), while in 'The Miseries of Whoring', a 'genteel' 'pretty Miss...takes a Lodging in Salisbury-court, / And sets up, being charming, young and fair, / The good old trade of Basket-making there' (p. 155). Yet another link occurs in *The Insinuating Bawd and The Repenting Harlot* (1700?) – one of the selections in this volume – which is also known to be by Ward. Its dedication refers to 'the Power of Tunbridge Waters, Aqua-Tetrachimagogon': this same mineral water appears in a list of medicines for abating the symptoms of venereal disease in *The Comforts of Whoreing*—'Aqua Tetrachimagogon, Turpentine Potions, Mercurial Pills, Sal Prunella,...Diet-Drinks' (p. 24).

The *Fifteen Real Comforts* actually contains eighteen 'real comforts', but the word 'fifteen' in a title had come to constitute a code for works containing erotic elements.¹ Ward draws attention to the use of the number in *The Pleasures of Matrimony*:

If there are Fifteen Comforts in Matrimony, by'r Lady, there are enough, (for who would not Marry to enjoy Fifteen Comforts?). I wish we may

1 Contemporary works with the word 'fifteen' used similarly in the title include *The Fifteen Comforts of a Lawyer* (1707); *The Fifteen Comforts of a Scotchman* (1707); *The Fifteen Comforts of a Dutchman* (1707); *The Fifteen Comforts of Good Parliament, and the Fifteen Plagues of a Bad One* (1711); *The Fifteen Plagues of a Lawyer, a Quack Doctor, a Recruiting Captain, and a Poulterer. To Which Is Added, the Fifteen Plagues of a Footman, Coach-man, and Nursery Maid* (1711).

make our words good, and find Fifteen; for the ancient Philosophers counted Seven to be the number of Perfection; now in Fifteen there is twice Seven, two perfect Numbers, and one to spare.¹

The most important work in the 'Fifteen Comforts' group is *The Fifteen Plagues of a Maiden-Head* (1707), which was the subject of the first Common-Law prosecution of an obscene publication. The case is important for understanding the legal use of terms such as 'lewd', 'lascivious', 'indecent', and 'bawdy' or 'bawdry' (the eighteenth-century equivalent to the term 'pornography'). One clear marker of indecent books, then as now, was the use of four-letter words, in this instance the word 'F—' (*sic*).

Prior to this case, obscenity and lewdness had been dealt with in the Ecclesiastical Courts, and obscene publications could be banned and suppressed under the Licensing Act; infringements were subject to fairly mild and unevenly applied punishments. The Licensing Act of 1662 lapsed in 1679 and was not renewed until 1685, continuing only until 1695, when it lapsed again and was abolished because Parliament felt that the offences it covered were adequately dealt with under Common Law. Common Law did indeed cover the serious offences of blasphemy, libel and sedition – all construed as threats to the peace of the realm and punished severely – but not obscenity. The resulting absence of pre-censorship was a great aid to the flowering of popular literature in general, and especially the growth of the periodical press. In 1688, under the Licensing Act, Benjamin Crayle and Joseph Streater were fined for selling and printing 'obscene and lascivious books', and in 1689 they were convicted for issuing *Sodom: or, The Quintessence of Debauchery*. Crayle was fined and perhaps imprisoned for a day or two. They were not charged with publishing an 'obscene libel' but with publishing a *librum flagitiosum et impudicum...scandalosum...lasciviosum*.²

The first prosecution for obscenity under Common Law was in 1663, when Sir Charles Sedley, together with Charles Sackville (Lord Buckhurst, later the Earl of Dorset) and Sir Thomas Ogle, after a drinking bout at the Cock tavern in Covent Garden, climbed onto a balcony, stripped themselves naked, assumed obscene postures, shouted indecencies at the gathering spectators, urinated into bottles and threw them into the crowd, who retaliated by stoning them until they fled. Sedley was

1 Only the second edition (1689) has been reported; the quotation appears on p. 5 of that edition.

2 See Thomas, *Long Time Burning*, pp. 23–4; for a review of the Licensing Act see pp. 14–15. See also David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1660–1745* (New Hyde Park, New York, 1964), pp. 7–10.

arrested, tried and convicted ‘for shewing himself naked in a balcony, and throwing down bottles (pist in) *vi et armis* among the people in Covent Garden, *contra pacem* and to the scandal of the government’,¹ for which he was fined 2000 marks, committed without bail for a week, and bound to his good behaviour for a year. It is important to note that Sedley was not convicted of obscenity or obscene behaviour *per se*, but for illegal acts, namely throwing objects likely to endanger life and limb (*vi et armis*), and to cause a breach of the peace (*contra pacem*). (A riot did in fact ensue.)

The first prosecution under Common Law for obscenity that did not also involve illegal behaviour was the prosecution of *The Fifteen Plagues of a Maiden-Head* as an ‘obscene libel’ – the legal term under which all subsequent ‘obscenity’ cases have been prosecuted in British law. At the Guildhall quarter sessions on 21 April 1707, James Read was indicted for causing ‘a Lascivious and obscene Libel’ to be printed on 15 March, and Angell Carter was indicted for publishing it on 19 March. Verdicts of guilty were returned. However, Read moved in arrest of judgment on the ground that ‘this Offence was proper for Ecclesiastical Conusance [i.e. cognizance], and no Offence at Common Law’. That is, bawdy was outside the jurisdiction of the secular courts, who ruled in matters involving Common and Statute Law, and could only be dealt with in the Ecclesiastical Courts, if they so chose.

The appeal was heard at the King’s Bench during the Easter Sessions of 1708.² Read’s counsel summarized the defence: Read’s publication of bawdy was not designed to disturb the public peace: ‘This is only general Satyr, exposing the Folly of young People, and exposes Fornication: An Indictment lies for Blasphemy but not for Obscenity. It was urged further that this could not be a Libel, because it was not against any particular Person or Persons’. Justice Robert Raymond cited an earlier case against Orm and Nutt for printing a false and scandalous libel, which was dismissed on the grounds that no particular persons were named therein. It is worth reproducing the ensuing exchange in the Court between Lord Chief Justice Sir John Holt and Justice Powell:

Holt: There are Ecclesiastical Courts, why may not this be punish’d there?

If we have no Precedent, we cannot punish, shew me any Precedent.

Powell: This is for printing Bawdy stuff, but reflects on no Person, and a Libel must be against some particular Person or Persons, or against the Government. It is stuff not fit to be mentioned publicly; if there

1 *LeRoy v. Sr. Charles Sedley*, Keble 620 (KB 1663), cited in Albert B. Gerber, *Sex, Pornography, and Justice* (New York, 1965), p. 55.

2 *Queen v. Read*, Fortescue 98, 92 Eng. Rep. 777 (KB 1708). The following quotations are from John Lord Fortescue, *Reports of Select Cases in All the Courts of Westminster-Hall* (1748), pp. 98–100.

should be no Remedy in a Spiritual Court, it does not follow there must be a Remedy here. There is no Law to punish it, I wish there were, but we cannot make Law; it indeed tends to the Corruption of good Manners, but that is not sufficient for us to punish.

Holt: Who is libel'd here? This may be said to be a Temptation to Incontinence, and therefore why not punishable in the Ecclesiastical Court? This tends to Bawdry as well as soliciting of Chastity, but they [i.e. the printer and publisher] do it only to get money [i.e. with no intention to breach the peace].

Powell: As to the Case of Sir *Charles Sedley*, I *Sid.* 168. there was something more in that Case, than shewing his naked Body in the Balcony, for that Case was *quod Vi & Armis* he piss'd down upon the Peoples Heads. Judgment *pro Def' nisi per tot' Cur'*.

A decision was postponed to the following term, when a judgment nisi was delivered in favour of the defendant, quashing the indictment against Read. This also automatically quashed the indictment against Carter. Another indictment, against John Marshall for republishing *Sodom: or, The Quintessence of Debauchery* and *The School of Love* in 1707, was also automatically dismissed. In 1709 John Marten's *Gonosologium Novum* (1709)¹ was prosecuted as an obscene libel before the Middlesex Grand Jury, but that indictment was dismissed, probably due to the precedent established by *Queen v. Read*.

The 1708 Read case therefore established, in an enlightened ruling, that a publication, however distasteful and indecent and even corrupting it might be, was not actually *harmful* to the public and therefore was not illegal. Unfortunately this commendable precedent was reversed in 1725–8, when Edmund Curll lost his appeal against his conviction for printing and publishing an 'obscene libel', *Venus in the Cloister: or, The Nun in Her Smock* (1724).²

The Court in this latter case considered the precedent of the Read case and more or less acknowledged that Curll had not libelled named persons, but nevertheless ruled that Curll had published an 'obscene libel'. In other words, the Court established the offence of 'obscene libel' under Common Law by removing the legal technicality that allowed persons to defend themselves specifically against libel, and made it necessary for them to defend themselves simply and wholly against the charge of obscenity. These two cases have been repeatedly cited as precedents even

1 For this work and its reception, see Rictor Norton, Headnote to *An Apology for a Latin Verse*, in *Eighteenth-Century British Erotica*, set I, vol. v. pp. 1–2

2 For the tortuous trial and its use of *Queen v. Read* as precedent, see Alexander Pettit, 'Rex v. Curll: Pornography and Punishment in Court and on the Page', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 34.1 (2001): 63–78. Curll argued in the press that Henry Rhodes had printed an edition of *Venus in the Cloister* in 1683 (see Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, p. 14).

in late twentieth-century obscene publication cases, and even in the American Supreme Court,¹ because they address the central and recurring question: is obscenity in itself sufficiently harmful to be illegal? The debate over this issue is as lively today as it has ever been, though today the regulation of obscene material focuses primarily on videos and broadcasting, protection of children, lack of consent, and violence – all features that are largely absent from early eighteenth-century bawdy

1 *United States v. 12 200-Ft. Reels of Film*, 413 U.S. 123 (1973). The Supreme Court's citation of the Read 1708 precedent was later cited in *State of Oregon v. Henry*, 302 Ore. 510; 732 P.2d 9; 14 Media L. Rep. 1011 (Oregon, 1987).



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The Pleasures of a Single Life, or, The Miseries of Matrimony (1701)

The Choice, or, The Pleasures of a Country-Life (1700)

The Pleasures of a Single Life was first published in 1701, in four states: by John Nutt, in two slightly different versions; by an unknown printer; and by Richard Briggs. The latter two are probably piracies. Nutt published a second edition in 1702. In 1705 a pirated 'second edition' appeared without information regarding its printer. The poem was published with John Pomfret's *The Choice* by Henry Hills in 1708; that edition is the source of the present text. Hills published the poems together again in 1708 and in 1709 (three states). Dublin editions appeared in 1710 and 1760.

Nutt first published *The Choice* in 1700 (or possibly in December 1699). Second and third editions were published before the end of 1700, and four London editions appeared in 1701. Two Edinburgh editions also appeared in 1701, and a Norwich edition followed at the beginning of 1702. *The Choice* and *The Pleasures of a Single Life* were frequently published throughout the century, both singly and together (from 1708), in Dublin and Edinburgh as well as in London.

The author of *The Pleasures of a Single Life* is not known. The 1760 Dublin edition of both poems attributed the work to Sir John Dillon, a spurious attribution that was adopted in the first American edition of 1763. The poem has been regularly attributed to Edward (Ned) Ward, simply because William Thomas Lowndes in *The Bibliographer's Manual of English Literature* (rev. edn, 1863) ascribed *The City Madam and the Country Maid* (1702) to Ward. (The title page of *The City Madam and the Country Maid* identified that work as written 'By the Author of the Pleasures of a Single Life', hence the further deduction.) Lowndes did not state the basis for his attribution. Nutt published both *The Pleasures of a Single Life* and *The City Madam*, so both may have been written by the same author, but Ward's modern biographer concludes that 'the fact that they were never included in any of the collected writings [by Ward] warrants their rejection' (Howard William Troyer, *Ned Ward of Grub Street*

(London, 1968), p. 279). Another attribution, to Thomas Brown, is considered spurious, and the hand-written attribution in an early edition of *The City Madam* to a 'Mr. More', if true, illuminates little, since such a person is otherwise unknown.

John Pomfret (1667–1702), author of *The Choice*, was born in Luton, the son of the local vicar, and educated at Bedford Grammar School and Queen's College, Cambridge, from which he graduated in 1684. He took orders and was granted the living of Maulden in Bedfordshire in 1695. His *Poems on Several Occasions* were published in 1699. He died of smallpox in 1702. *The Choice* was an immediate success and continued to be popular throughout the century. Dr Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets* commented, 'perhaps no composition in our language has been oftener perused'. Henry Compton, Bishop of London, declined to recommend Pomfret's preferment because of the preference given in the poem to a mistress (a 'Witty Nymph') over a wife and children, though Pomfret was in fact himself married.

Both poems are part of the pastoral tradition praising the good life conceived in terms of Horatian moderation; in fact *The Choice* is modelled on Horace, *Satires*, ii. 6. *The Pleasures of a Single Life* is, further, a topical poem, 'Occasionally Writ Upon the many DIVORCES lately Granted by Parliament'. The granting of divorces by Parliament was relatively uncommon; but the Consistory Court, which granted legal separations, heard sixty-five divorce suits during 1700–9 and the same number during the next decade (see Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution* (Chicago, 1998), p. 327). The poem was a response to contemporary alarm about the stability of marriage and incorporates contemporary debates about the theological basis for divorce. For example, the author of the pamphlet *A Treatise Concerning Adultery and Divorce* (1700) argued that Origen's and Chrysostom's interpretation of Levitical law, according to which a man could divorce his wife for being 'barren, ugly, peevish or disagreeable' (p. 6), was contradicted by the gospel of Matthew (19: 3–9), in which Jesus asserts that a man can divorce his wife only if she has committed fornication, whereby she no longer remained 'one flesh' with her husband.

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THE
PLEASURES
OF A
Single LIFE,
OR, THE
MISERIES
OF
MATRIMONY.

Occasionally Writ
Upon the many DIVORCES lately
Granted by Parliament.

WITH THE
CHOICE,
OR, THE
Pleasures of a Country - LIFE.

Dedicatèd to the Beaus against the next Vacation.

London: Printed and Sold by *H. Hills*, in *Black-fryars*,
near the *Water-side*. 1709. *Price One Penny.*

T H E
Pleasures of a Single LIFE,

O R,

The Miseries of Matrimony.

Occasionally Writ upon the many DIVORCES
lately Granted by Parliament.

W Edlock, oh ! Curs'd uncomfortable State,
Cause of my Woes, and Object of my hate.
How blest'd was I? Ah, once how happy me?
When I from those uneasie Bonds were free ;
How calm my Joys ? How peaceful was my Breast;
Till with thy fatal Cares too soon oppress'd,
The World seem'd Paradise, so blest'd the Soil
Wherein I liv'd, that Business was no Toil ;
Life was a Comfort, which produc'd each day
New Joys, that still preserv'd me from decay,
Thus Heav'n first launch'd me into pacifick Seas,
Where free from Storms I mov'd with gentle Breeze ;
My Sails proportion'd, and my Vessel tite,
Coasting in Pleasures-Bay I steer'd aright,
Pallac'd with true Content, and fraughted with delight }
Books-my Companions were wherein I found
Needful Advice, without a noisy Sound,
But was with friendly pleasing silence taught,
Wisdom's best Rules, to fructify my Thought,
Rais'd up our Sage Fore-fathers from the dead, }
And when I pleas'd, invok'd them to my Aid,
Who at my Study-Bar without a Fee would plead :
Whilst I Chief Justice sat, heard all their Sutes,
And-gave my Judgment on their learn'd Disputes ;
Strove to determine ev'ry Cause aright,
And for my Pains found Profit and Delight,
Free from Partiality ; I fear'd no blame,
Desir'd no Brib'ry, and deserv'd no Shame, } But

But like an upright Judge, grudg'd no Expence
 Of time, to fathom Truth with Diligence,
 Reading by Day, Contemplating by Night,
 Till Conscience told me that I judg'd aright,
 Then to my Paper-VVorld I'd have recourse,
 And by my Maps run o'er the Universe ;
 Sail round the Globe, and touch at every Port,
 Survey those Shoars where Men untam'd resort,
 View the old Regions where the *Persian* Lord
 Taught Wooden Deities first to be Ador'd,
 Enfnar'd at last to Sacrifice his Life
 To the base Pride of an Adult'rous Wife,
 And where the *Grecian* Youth to Arms inur'd,
 The hungry Soil with *Persian* Blood manur'd,
 Where bold *Busephilus* brutal Conduct show'd,
 The force of monstrous Elephants withstood,
 And with his Rider waded through a purple Flood.

Then would I next the *Roman* Field survey,
 Where brave *Fabricius* with his Army lay ;
 Fam'd for his Valour, from Corruption free,
 Made up of Courage and Humility.
 That when Encamp'd the good Man lowly bent,
 Cook'd his own Cabbage in his homely Tent :
 And when the *Samaïtes* sent a Golden Sum,
 To tempt him to betray his Country *Rome*,
 The Dross he scoffingly return'd untold,
 And answer'd with a Look serenely bold, Gold : }
 That *Roman* Sprouts would boil without their *Grecian* }
 Then eat his Cale-worts for his Meal design'd,
 And beat the *Grecian* Army when he'd din'd.

Thus wou'd I range the World from Pole to Pole;
 To encrease my Knowledge, and delight my Soul ;
 Travel all Nations, and inform my Sence ;
 With ease and safety, at a small Expence :
 No Storms to plough, no Passengers Sums to pay,
 No Horse to hire, or Guide to show the way,
 No *Alps* to clime, no Defarts here to pass,
 No Ambuscades, no Thief to give me chase ;

No Bear to dread, or rav'nous Wolf to fight,
 No Flies to sting, no Rattle-Snakes to bite ;
 No Floods to ford, no Hurricans to fear ;
 No dreadful Thunder to surprize the Ear ;
 No Winds to freeze, no Sun to scorch or fry,
 No Thirst, or Hunger, and Relief not nigh.
 All these Fatigues and Mischiefs could I shun ;
 Rest when I pleas'd, and when I please Jog on, }
 And travel through both *Indies* in an Afternoon.

When the Day thus far pleasingly was spent,
 And every Hour administred Content;
 Then would I range the Fields, and flow'ry Meads,
 VVhere Nature her exub'rant Bounty spreads,
 In whose delightful Products does appear
 Inimitable Beauty ev'ry where ;

Contemplate on each Plant, and useful VVeed,
 And how its Form first lay involv'd in Seed,
 How they're preserv'd by Providential Care,
 For what design'd, and what their Virtues are.

Thus to my Mind by dint of Reason prove,
 That all below is ow'd to Heaven above,
 And that no Earthly Temporals can be,
 But what must Center in Eternity.

Then gaze aloft, whence all things had their Birth,
 And mount my prying Soul 'twixt Heaven and Earth,
 Thus the sweet Harmony o'th' whole admire,
 And by due Search new Learning still acquire, }
 So nearer ev'ry day to Truths Divine aspire.

When tir'd with thought, then from my Pocket pluck
 Some friendly dear Companion of a Book,
 Whose homely Calves-kin fences did contain
 The Verbal Treasure of some Old good Man :
 Made by long study and experience wise,
 Whose piercing thoughts to Heavenly knowledge rise,
 Amongst whose Pious Reliques I would find,
 Rules for my Life, Rich Banquets for my mind,
 Such pleasing Nectar, such Eternal Food,
 That well digested, makes a Man a God ;

And

And for his use at the same time prepares
 On Earth a Heav'n in spite of worldly Cares,
 The day in these Enjoyments would I spend,
 But chuse at Night my Bottle and my Friend,
 Took prudent care that neither were abus'd,
 But with due Moderation both I us'd.
 And in one sober Pint found more delight,
 Then the insatiate Sot that swills all Night ;
 Ne'er drown my Senses, or my Soul debase,
 Or drink beyond the relish of my blas
 For in Excess good Heav'ns design is Cross,
 In all Extrems the true Enjoyments lost,
 Wine cheers the Heart, and elevates the Soul,
 But if we surfeit with too large a Bowl,
 Wanting true Aim weth' happy Mark o'er Shoot,
 And change the Heavenly Image to a Brute.
 So the great *Grecian* who the World subdu'd,
 And drown'd whole Nations in a Sea of Blood ;
 At last was Conquer'd by the Power of Wine,
 And dy'd a Drunken Victim to the Vine.
 My Friend, and I, when o'er our Bottle sat,
 Mix'd with each Glass some inoffensive Chat,
 Talk'd of the World's Affairs, but still kept free
 From Passion, Zeal, or Partiality ;
 With honest freedom did our thoughts dispense,
 And judg'd of all things with indifference ;
 Till time at last did our Delights invade,
 And in due season separation made,
 Then without Envy, Discord or Deceit,
 Part like true Friends as loving as we meet.
 The Tavern change to a domestick scene,
 That sweet Retirement. tho it's ne'er so mean.
 Thus leave each other in a Cheerful Plight,
 T' enjoy the silent Pleasures of the Night,
 When home return'd, my Thanks to Heaven pay,
 For all the past kind Blessing of the Day ;
 No haughty Help-mate to my Peace molest,
 No treacherous Snake to harbour in my Breast: