

Crafting A ‘Quality Whore’: The Performativity of Contingent Social Elevation in *The Juvenile Adventures of Kitty Fisher* and *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury*

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BETWEEN A LUXURIOUSLY-DRESSED WOMAN’S THUMB and forefinger dangles a pearl earring—the final garnish for the contents of the golden chalice in her other hand. Joshua Reynolds’s 1759 painting, *Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl*, illustrates the story of the queen’s expensive and showy meal: a pearl dissolved in vinegar. While the story is Cleopatra’s, the costumed body represented in the painting is that of Kitty Fisher, a high-profile British courtesan. Between 1759 and 1767, Reynolds, eighteenth-century artist and founder of the Royal Academy of Arts, painted nine known portraits of this high-class prostitute.¹ Fisher posed for Reynolds on multiple occasions, though few eighteenth-century prostitutes had the opportunity to pose for such a distinguished artist. Reynolds painted *Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl* in the style of the Grand Manner portrait, a technique usually reserved for upper-class subjects to imply the subject’s nobility via a costumed imitation of another person’s recognizable characteristics. One of Reynolds’ other paintings from 1759, simply titled *Catherine (Kitty) Fisher*, depicts the courtesan a portraiture style that was popular for wealthy British woman; David Mannings even notes the resemblance between the courtesan’s pose and Lady Caroline Adair’s in one of Reynolds’s earlier portraits.² Both paintings showcase the relationship between the courtesan’s elevated social position and the stigmas associated with her career, inviting anxieties about a prostitute whose appearance suggests that she possesses upper-class qualities; the unexpected sight of a prostituted female body painted in this style would have disconcerted contemporary viewers who were eager to distinguish the femininity of a prostitute from that of a respectable woman.

Even as Fisher’s body takes on the qualities of the upper-class women who usually posed for these portraits, any recognition of her upper-class femininity is limited. Angela Rosenthal observes that *Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl* has a “mock-heroic tone.”³ Indeed, Fisher is a “mock” royal because viewers can sufficiently identify her appearance as a “mimicry” of Cleopatra’s royal status. In Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial concept of mimicry, the colonized subjects’ imitation of the colonizer is distinguishable by its “slippage,” the excess or difference found in the subject’s performance.⁴ Though Bhabha refers to colonized populations outside of Europe, his concept of mimicry parallels British treatment of domestic groups, like prostitutes, who threatened to destroy delicate social

¹David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 188. Fisher’s last recorded sitting is 1767, the year of her death, but it is unclear whether all of the paintings were completed that year.

²Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 188.

³Angela H. Rosenthal, “The Fall and Rise of Kitty Fisher: Joshua Reynolds and the Sitter’s Share,” in *Framing Women: Changing Frames of Representation from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism*, ed. Sandra Carroll, et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 63.

⁴Homi Bhabha “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *The Location of Culture*, 85-92.

structures and alter existing power dynamics. Mimicry certainly applies to Fisher's costume and pose in *Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl*; her imitation of Cleopatra can only make Fisher "almost but not quite" recognizable as a royal woman.⁵

Responses to the threat prostitutes' social elevation posed to eighteenth-century social structures extended far beyond Reynolds' portraits. Rosenthal points out that courtesans like Fisher "troubled assumptions concerning gender and class, throwing into question the definition of 'femininity.'"⁶ When Fisher, dressed and painted in the same manner as a traditionally respectable gentlewoman, imitates a socially constructed idea of upper-class femininity, viewers pinpointed the visible evidence of Fisher's career to separate her from women whose characters more accurately reflected contemporary expectations of upper-class femininity: the note from a client that Fisher holds in her hand, the "sharpness" of her gaze, and even the way she "coyly" tilts her head marks her profession.⁷ Such fixation on characteristics associated with Fisher's employment in response to her performance of upper-class femininity reflect Bhabha's theory that colonizers identified "slippage" in colonized subjects to maintain an existing balance of power— under such constant scrutiny, courtesan's gender and class performance constrained to a liminal space between that of a prostitute and a respectable upper-class woman.

The authors of two eighteenth-century prostitute narratives, *The Juvenile Adventures of Kitty Fisher* and *Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury*, trace the women's path to the elevated position of courtesan within the professional ranks of prostitution. To differentiate the prostitute's imitation of characteristics of upper-class women, the authors link the courtesans' social elevation to the deceptive tendencies associated with prostitution. Male voices openly author *Authentick Memoirs*, which was first published in 1723 as an episodic collection of stories that the author Captain Charles Walker claims are letters from courtesan Sally Salisbury's lovers. It offers a bolder, more explicit glimpse at the underlying prejudices visible in both authors' narrative depictions of the respective courtesans. *Authentick Memoirs* and *Juvenile Adventures* provide the opportunity to examine the authors' version of each woman's social position in these constructed narratives—accounts whose authors appropriate the subjects' voices and use them in representations that directly contribute to those women's public personae.

In both *Juvenile Adventures* and *Authentick Memoirs*, the authors explain Salisbury's and Fisher's moves from prostitutes to courtesans as the result of the women's upper-class personae, crafted to manipulate their clients and elevate their status, thereby allowing them to lead a temporary and limited version of an upper-class lifestyle. Over the course of the narratives, it becomes obvious that this social elevation is contingent on factors outside Salisbury's and Fisher's control, such as the wealth and interest of the courtesan's clients and the public's perception of the women. Rather than proving the authors' conceptions of courtesans as conniving prostitutes, Salisbury's and Fisher's repeated imitation of upper-class habitus, or the habits, skills, and dispositions learned through their experiences, displays the women's ability to take advantage of limited opportunities to pursue their desired expression of upper-class femininity and to experience a fleeting lifestyle that would otherwise be unavailable to a common prostitute. As a result, Salisbury's and Fisher's imitation is performative, a constant and unintentional re-establishment, or repeated habitual citation, of their gender and class, based on their conditioned conceptions of femininity. The women constantly create a new identity for themselves that is proximal to both prostitutes' and upper-class women's femininity but which is unique to them as courtesans.

⁵Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man," 85-92.

⁶Rosenthal, "The Fall and Rise of Kitty Fisher," 58.

⁷Ibid., 72.

“The More Expensive End of the Trade”⁸: A Lady of Virtuous Sensibility on the Streets, But a Prostitute in the Sheets

The narratives scrutinize Salisbury’s and Fisher’s social elevation so intently because, as courtesans, they occupy that curious intersection between the typical performance of upper-class femininity and the prostitution associated with lower classes, posing a threat to existing structures of gender and class. Early definitions of the word ‘courtesan’ included women who were mistresses to royalty: “court-mistress; a woman of the town, a prostitute.”⁹ This definition suggests that the terms prostitute and courtesan were connected, but they were not synonymous; “courtesan” is indicative of a wealthy and socially elite clientele. While a streetwalker and a courtesan may both have been employed as prostitutes, courtesans experienced their trade differently because they interacted with the upper-class. One dictionary even uses the term “quality whore” to define a courtesan’s elevated status.¹⁰ The label of courtesan might have implied a higher “quality” prostitute, but a courtesan was still a “whore”—an employment that, by nature of the associated social stigmas and lack of economic independence, limits any sense of social stability or mobility. Courtesans may have enjoyed an elevated status within the realm of prostitution when they temporarily moved away from the class in which many of their peers lived and worked, but this did not necessarily establish them more firmly in any higher social structure, as evidenced by Salisbury’s and Fisher’s unstable social status.

The courtesans’ precarious social position disrupted eighteenth-century structures of gender and class because it contained contradictory features of upper-class femininity and prostitution.¹¹ To maintain a respectable appearance, upper-class women followed certain guidelines often codified in conduct manuals for women: a passive sensibility in their mannerisms, preservation of a virtuous reputation until marriage, and faithfulness to their husbands thereafter.¹² Prostitution was inconsistent with these expectations—a compromised reputation rendered prostitutes undesirable for marriage and positioned them in the public sphere to conduct a business that involved selling their bodies to multiple partners. This apparent mutual exclusivity contributed to the classification of prostitutes in eighteenth-century Britain as social outsiders. Most prostitutes were “born in the poorest sections of the community and [...] acquired few skills while growing up that would allow them to escape poverty.”¹³ Because most prostitutes’ socioeconomic background offered few opportunities for social mobility, courtesans were unique even in their qualified social elevation. Wherever they fell on the socioeconomic scale, prostitutes held a marginalized position in society. According

⁸Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (London: Longman, 1999), 35.

⁹*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), s.v. “Courtesan.”

¹⁰*A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew*, 1st ed. (London: Printed for W. Hawes, etc., 1699), s.v. “Curtezan.”

¹¹Deborah Logan, “‘Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse’: Representations of Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing,” 27-31. The narratives’ attempt to identify the courtesans’ social position relates to increasing anxieties about recognition in eighteenth-century Britain; as industrialization created a potential space for anonymity within growing cities and shifting class structures a certain uneasiness about defining women’s morality and class also developed. These shifts are a precursor to what Deborah Anna Logan observes in the nineteenth century when the bourgeois ideology instituted ideas that “the women of the undeserving poor were indistinguishable from prostitutes” and literary characters whose class and morality “resist easy categorization arouse middle-class anxieties, like ‘the fear that respectability is a masquerade’ [...]and that the possibility for the fallen to rise by association implies the possibility for the respectable to fall.” These anxieties manifested themselves in fiction as writers “manipulated the prostitution and economics link by recasting the idea that one’s class provides the clearest indicator of moral standards.” Though written in the preceding century, *Juvenile Adventures* and *Authentick Memoirs* demonstrate a similar tendency to conflate class with respectability.

¹²*Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity*, edited by Vivien Jones, Routledge, 1990.

¹³Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 14.

to contemporary commentators, prostitutes were “a distinct group—‘the frail sisterhood’—separate from the majority of labouring people” even though in many London districts they lived and worked alongside other members of the laboring class.¹⁴ Though this definition pertains to streetwalkers, who often divided their incomes with brothel owners and only received “paltry financial rewards,” it implies that courtesans not only threatened class structures, but, as prostitutes who seemingly moved in from the margins of society with no repercussions, also potentially endangered upper-class femininity.¹⁵ The courtesans’ ambiguous social status prompts the constant identification of any characteristics that could be used to differentiate their gender performance from that of respectable upper-class women.

Designs of An Upper-Class Prostitute: A Mannered Manipulation

Though courtesans such as Salisbury and Fisher could not fully access upper-class social circles and only elevated their status within the ranks of prostitution, contemporary literary representations reveal concerns about prostitutes’ potential to contaminate the reputability of upper-class femininity. Ruth Perry points out the “dramatic juxtaposition of good girls and fallen women” in late eighteenth-century fiction and observes that the “terror” expressed by those virtuous women who “wish the difference between themselves and the fallen women were more obvious and visible” is partially related to fearful attitudes toward any “promiscuous mingling of classes.”¹⁶ In *Juvenile Adventures* and *Authentic Memoirs*, the authors use both male and female characters to express similar concerns about Salisbury and Fisher, who both frequently appear to be reputable upper-class women even though the nature of their career upends ideas of respectable femininity. The authors’ approach to defining the courtesans’ social role corresponds with a sub-genre of prostitute narratives popular in the early to mid-eighteenth century: the libertine narrative. Rosenthal describes this sub-genre as one which depicts common, lower-class prostitutes as capable of elevating their status through ambition, beauty, craftiness, and a display of elite mannerisms.¹⁷ In other words, libertine narratives portray prostitutes as scheming, dissembling social climbers because they use their imitation of upper-class mannerisms to boost their social status through their trade.

¹⁴Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 43, 35.

¹⁵Henderson, *Disorderly Women*, 35, 167, 169. This threat was outlined in one popular conception of prostitutes as “predators” who tempted men with dress and “painted faces” in order to infiltrate upper-class respectability, “spreading physical ruin and moral disintegration.” Prostitutes were also criticized for a lifestyle that ruled out useful feminine traits, such as “mothering children” and deemed them “a pernicious charge upon the wealth and resources of their country.” Business, pleasure, economic transaction and moral downfall—none of the traits of a prostitute aligned with expectations for the behavior of upper-class women.

¹⁶Ruth Perry, “Good Girls and Fallen Women: Representations of Prostitutes in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction,” *Narrating Transgression: Representations of the Criminal in Early Modern England*, (1999) 91, 95.

¹⁷Laura Jean Rosenthal, Introduction to *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives from the Eighteenth Century* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008) xx. Rosenthal defines the libertine narrative in contrast to sentimental narratives, which attribute prostitution to a woman’s fall from respectability as a victim of circumstance.

Jennie Batchelor and Megan Hiatt, introduction to *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House* (London: Routledge, 2016). Scholars seem to agree that the narrative of fallen women as victims of circumstance, as opposed to the earlier libertine narrative, gained popularity towards the end of the eighteenth century and dominated conversation in the nineteenth century, framing prostitutes as suffering at the hands of poverty and misfortune. An example of sentimental narrative is *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House*, a framed novel containing multiple fictional stories claiming to be loosely based on the lives of women who lived at a charitable home for repentant prostitutes. This publication was intended to garner support for the institution by emphasizing that women were driven to prostitution by their circumstances and deserved to be saved. The “novel” has been praised for presenting prostitutes as victims of corrupt society because of their treatment by men, their poor or violent backgrounds, or their lack of access to education.

In *Authentick Memoirs* and *Juvenile Adventures*, the authors' libertine depictions of the courtesans exist without representation from the women themselves. While reflective of current critical discourse rather than the considerations of the eighteenth-century authors, recent conversations about the vulnerability of sex-workers problematize the authors' erasure of the courtesans' voices and their ascription of power to women in a vulnerable position.¹⁸ Despite the absence of the courtesans' voices in either narrative, both authors employ certain devices to protect the credibility of their representations. Captain Charles Walker claims that *Authentick Memoirs* is the result of his own research on Salisbury's life in conjunction with the experiences of other men. The anonymous author of *Juvenile Adventures* claims to have translated and adapted a Spanish story "to English manners," seemingly as a tactic to avoid attacks on the legitimacy of his stories about a real woman and protect the anonymity of her powerful male clients.¹⁹ The authors' self-removal from the position of sole contributor to the narratives is also an assurance that their accounts align with common perceptions of the women; their portrayal of the courtesans as dissembling prostitutes extends beyond their personal interests in writing about these women to reflect eighteenth-century attitudes towards prostitutes.

The authors' tactics for preserving their credibility point to the primarily male perspective through which they write the courtesans and other women in the narratives. In her exploration of eighteenth-century literature in which male authors write first-person narratives in a female voice, Nancy K. Miller interrogates the potential motivations behind such an impersonation at a time when a male identity was considered superior.²⁰ She hypothesizes that the male author's purpose for "becoming the Other" is to be "admired by and for himself"; the texts are the product of the authors' desire to be the object of the male gaze.²¹ As the men take on women's voices for each other, their disguise makes "'woman' [...] the legal fiction, the present absence that allows the male bond" to exist within the accepted frameworks.²² Though the authors of *Juvenile Adventures* and *Authentick Memoirs* do not directly present themselves as female voices, their claim to have created accurate representations of the courtesans raises similar questions. Miller's proposition that the authorial use of female drag allows male authors to form bonds through a woman and simultaneously reinforce masculine authority is reflective of the authors' discomfort with women who do not fit into a clear category of class and gender evident in their depictions of the courtesans.

The authors use characteristics commonly associated with prostitutes, such as their intentions to snare and allure men, to define their own masculinity and distance themselves from their female subjects. The manner in which Walker and the other letter writers discuss Salisbury in *Authentick Memoirs* calls to mind Miller's proposition that a male author can identify with other men "through the text of his experience of the Other."²³ In the case of this narrative, Walker uses his characterization of Salisbury to connect with the other male authors through their experiences of Salisbury's apparent deceitfulness. Miller might refer to these moments in conjunction with the ideology of women as "knowable hence despicable."²⁴ Salisbury is overtly sexualized in many scenes, but when the author directly condemns her as dissembling, she also serves as an excuse for the male voices to communicate with each other. While introducing Salisbury, Walker declares that women like her

¹⁸Amber Horning, "Quitting the Sex Trade: Keeping Narratives inside the Debates on Prostitution Policy and Legislation," *Victims & Offenders*, 14:5 (2019): 533-539. Some scholars view prostitution as "inherently coercive" and Horning calls attention to the fact that debates over whether or not sex-work can be successfully regulated to prevent trafficking often do not take into account the perspective of those within the trade.

¹⁹"The Juvenile Adventures of Miss Kitty F[ishe]r (1759)" in *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives from the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Laura Jean Rosenthal, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), 70.

²⁰Nancy Miller, "'I's' In Drag: The Sex of Recollection," *The Eighteenth Century*, 22.1 (1981): 49.

²¹Miller, "'I's' In Drag," 50.

²²*Ibid.*, 49.

²³*Ibid.*, 50.

²⁴Miller, "'I's' In Drag," 51.

“talk, and move, and smile with a Design upon Us”; he identifies himself as part of a group being victimized by prostitutes.²⁵ To support this notion, Walker suggests that even when courtesans “[appear] Amiable, [...] every Feature of their Faces and every Part of their Dress is fill’d with Snares and Allurements.”²⁶ Walker uses this warning about prostitutes’ appearance to directly address other men, to call attention to the falsity he sees in Salisbury, and to issue a warning for men who are oblivious to the craftiness of women like her. This direct communication between male authorial voices openly addresses the courtesans’ “slippage” and therefore anticipates and prevents the men from potentially recognizing the courtesan’s gender and class performance as they would that of a respectable upper-class woman.

The other letter-writers tend to criticize Salisbury when her performance of upper-class femininity is intended to maintain the temporary elevation gained through her association with an upper-class client. One letter signed J.S. refers to Salisbury as a “Cunning Jilt” and “Designing Jade” in response to her success at calming the Baron, an angry client who believes he contracted venereal disease from the courtesan.²⁷ The Baron forgets his complaints and reestablishes his business when Salisbury insists with “sham Tears [which] moved [him]” that she came from a “good Family.”²⁸ J.S. is irritated that the Baron, unaware of the “sham” in Salisbury’s claim to be from a respectable family, pays Salisbury and provides her with a meal “at his expense.”²⁹ In his obliviousness, the Baron not only ignores the potential physical and moral contamination from this prostitute, but also continues to assist her imitation of his class. Similar accusations of naivety emphasize the detestable behavior of prostitutes throughout the narrative. Spoken through the words and actions Walker attributes to others, including Salisbury herself, his warnings to the other male authors and readers reinforce his condemnation of the courtesan’s deviousness when he cannot clearly identify any other “slippage” to mark her as a prostitute.

Though perhaps less explicitly than in *Authentick Memoirs*, the author of *Juvenile Adventures* also categorizes much of Fisher’s behavior as a manipulative performance that enables her elevation to the status of courtesan. While Walker characterizes Salisbury through his warnings to other men, the author of *Juvenile Adventures* connects Fisher’s social elevation to her manipulation of men by describing the advice Fisher receives from other courtesans. When Fisher first dabbles in prostitution, Mrs S, an experienced courtesan, teaches Fisher how to use her “beauty, learning, and other accomplishments of a gentlewoman” to her benefit.³⁰ Mrs S instructs Fisher to use her “cunning” to “be[come] mistress of” men’s desires by instilling them with “an opinion of [her] choiceness” and thereby receiving rewards of the “most extravagant presents.”³¹ This successful courtesan promises the younger woman that she can gain limited access to higher social circles through well-paying clients if she presents herself as high-class, confident, and expensive— a display that would aggravate Walker for its appearance of upper-class respectability and intentional influence over men. The author subtly uses Mrs S’s voice to pin the courtesans’ dismantling of class and gender structures on the courtesans themselves.

²⁵Charles Walker, “Authentick Memoirs of the Life, Intrigues, and Adventures of the Celebrated Sally Salisbury” in *Nightwalkers: Prostitute Narratives from the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Laura Jean Rosenthal (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), 9.

²⁶Walker, “Authentick Memoirs, 9.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 21, 22.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰“*Juvenile Adventures*,” 137.

³¹*Ibid.*, 137

Schemers Persona-fied

Though it seems Mrs S successfully performs upper-class femininity to advance socially and Salisbury keeps the Baron's business by convincing him that she is from a respectable family, courtesans' access to upper-class recognition remains contingent on factors beyond their control. The mere existence of any relationship between a courtesan and her client depends on the client's wealth and sustained interest. The fact that Salisbury and Fisher rely on their clients to perform their identities as courtesans undermines the authors' suggestion that a courtesan's social elevation is due to a manipulation of her clients. Towards the beginning of *Authentick Memoirs*, Walker points out that it is "by the Acquaintance of these Noblemen, [Salisbury] enrich'd her self."³² Despite Walker's frequent assertions that Salisbury schemes her way to the top, he inadvertently connects her social elevation to the "noblemen" through whom she "enriches" herself. It is only through her acquaintance with such clients that Salisbury has access to the money, clothing, and other items that are part of her performance of a wealthy woman.

Ironically, Walker's comment implies that Salisbury's male clients, including Walker and the other letter writers who agree with his characterization of her as manipulative, are complicit in Salisbury's elevation to courtesan. Their involvement creates a tension between Walker's conception of the influence Salisbury's scheming has over her social elevation and the extent to which it relies on other people. The power dynamics in the courtesan-client relationship throughout *Authentick Memoirs* and *Juvenile Adventures* indicate that the men have more control over Salisbury's and Fisher's social elevation than the women themselves. While the courtesans sometimes cut off the relationships in these narratives, the majority end on the clients' terms. Either way, the courtesans are the ones who lose their source of income and access to the resources that assist their imitation of upper-class femininity. On one occasion, Fisher is deprived of business and searches for work in a theater; however, she quickly realizes it will not be easy to secure a role on the stage, determines that "she must even wh—e on," and becomes involved with drama critic Don Lavinio.³³ The author stresses that Lavinio's business is sufficient to keep Fisher "easy in her situation and circumstances," which suggests that any attempt on her part to alter that situation is unnecessary and a result of her greed and social ambition.³⁴ Because this view of her socioeconomic position is established while she is involved with Lavinio, when Fisher seizes the opportunity to gain another client and potentially a closer level of comfort to that of the upper-class, the author has set Fisher up to appear like a scheming prostitute taking advantage of multiple men at the same time. Learning that another one of her acquaintances at the theater, Don Bassono, is "a rich man, who threw away upwards of twenty thousand pistoles a year upon women," Fisher "readily conclude[s] he was a man entirely for her purpose."³⁵ Fisher's identification of Bassono as a prospective client may reflect the writer's idea of the courtesan as manipulative, but she is taking advantage of a prime opportunity to experience a lifestyle she desires.

The author stresses the consequences of Fisher's unnecessary pursuit of a second lover, thereby suggesting that her career prevents her from remaining in a position to imitate an upper-class lifestyle. Fisher's situation drastically changes when Lavinio overhears her "tender" conversation with Bassono.³⁶ He is no longer interested in her, and tells her to "depart hence [...] with what belongs to [her], that [he] may have an apartment for one more faithful to [him] and [his] bed."³⁷ Lavinio insists she leave with only those items that belong to her, indicating that she is no longer

³² Walker, "Authentick Memoirs, 27.

³³ "Juvenile Adventures," 122.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

welcome to share any of his own money or belongings. His desire for a woman who will be more faithful to him suggests the “slippage” that separates Fisher from a respectably married upper-class woman: Fisher’s business method involves selling her body to multiple people, which prevents her from imitating that monogamous relationship. The narrative punishes Fisher for her attempt to elevate her position by entertaining two men simultaneously. Bassono, called away for business with no hope of returning, is not even available to replace Lavinio and keep Fisher in her “easy” circumstances. The combined withdrawal of income from both men leaves “Kitty’s finances [...] in a bad condition” and the courtesan is no closer to a stable upper-class lifestyle than before she became involved with either man.³⁸ Fisher cannot control the longevity of those relationships and without her clients, the courtesan is not only at loss financially, but is also deprived of the necessary support for her performance of upper-class femininity.

The clients’ control over the courtesans’ income disproves the libertine convention of prostitutes as dissembling social climbers. At the beginning of Salisbury’s engagements with one client, he insists that “no Cost was to be spared for any Ornaments that his SALLY fancy’d would make an Addition to her Charms.”³⁹ At the height of his interest, the client willingly spends money on Salisbury, not only for her services, but also on those “ornaments” that she fancies so that “almost every New-Day [she] appear[s] in a New-Dress, and out-shin[es] them all in Atlases and Brocades.”⁴⁰ The client’s gifts assist Salisbury’s performance of upper-class femininity by making her the envy of other women and rendering her “desirable to Thousands in Vain.”⁴¹ Beyond its beauty and newness, the dress allows Salisbury to be desirable in a different way than a streetwalker; her clothing becomes a visible sign of her involvement with a well-paying client and makes her appear out of reach to the lower classes who would not be able to afford the same prices. Her imitation of upper-class femininity depends on a nuanced gender expression: both in the display of wealth and in the exclusivity of her companionship.

Imitation Games

Fisher’s performance is laden with even more extravagant exhibitions than Salisbury’s. The Count de Peeporo, one of Fisher’s “principal benefactors,” is so enamored by Fisher that he does not offer even the “smallest denial of indulgence” and provides her with money, gifts, and clothing as she requests them.⁴² Only when Fisher insists on receiving a custom riding-habit identical to one his wife owns—a “riding dress so extremely remarkable and uncommon, that it was noticed [...] by many ladies of Madrid”—does the Count deny Fisher, as he knows that the habit will attract the Countess’s attention and disturb his family life.⁴³ Yet the Count’s “passion [gets] the better of his prudence” eventually; when Fisher threatens to stop receiving him he agrees to commission a second riding-habit.⁴⁴ Despite its potential to affect her future interactions with the Count, Fisher is drawn to the riding habit precisely because of its conspicuousness. Fisher’s threat to stop receiving the Count indicates her primary interest is to own and wear a dress that will allow her to be seen in the same way as the Countess—a woman who flaunts her wealth and social position to the point that people recognize a singular item of her clothing. While Fisher’s motivation to imitate the Countess could stem from many possible sources—she could be trying to invest in her appearance to attract wealthier clients or access spaces otherwise closed to her—she willingly risks

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁹ Walker, “Authentick Memoirs,” 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

sacrificing a client to further her imitation of a specific upper-class femininity.

Substantiating the Count's initial concerns, the Countess, dressed in her own riding-habit, encounters Fisher in the park on the first day the courtesan wears the dress in public. After the women engage in a "staring match [...] which last[s] near a quarter of an hour" and ends without a winner, the Countess discovers her husband's involvement and retaliates by refusing to sleep with him until he discontinues his relationship with Fisher. Though the Countess and the courtesan are identically dressed and equally matched in the staring contest, Fisher's power over the Count's "passion" can only go so far: the Count determines to "discontinue the intimacy" with the courtesan because it jeopardizes his relationship with his wife.⁴⁵ Despite the courtesan's successful acquisition of the garment, the author ensures that Fisher's performance of upper-class femininity cannot be confused with the Countess's. As with Reynolds' portrait of Cleopatra, Fisher imitates a well-known person (a measure of some similarity), but also simultaneously provides an opportunity to identify that performance as mimicry. The Countess's influence over her husband consequentially leaves Fisher in the "same proportion in a drawback upon his income."⁴⁶ Despite her active role in the dress's production, Fisher does not have the same influence over the Count that his wife does, and without his support the courtesan proportionally loses all the wealth—material and social—that she gained while in the relationship.

Private Lives in the Public Eye: Did You *See* Whose Clothes She Was Wearing?

Although the women's encounter occurs in a public park, *Juvenile Adventures* does not elaborate on the public's response to Fisher wearing the Countess's dress. Yet, even outside such intimate relationships as those between client and courtesan or husband and wife, public discussions of Salisbury and Fisher contribute to the courtesans' ability to secure clients and experience social elevation. Patricia Meyer Spacks's discussions of eighteenth-century perceptions of gossip and its relation to female sexuality provide some insight to its role in the narratives.⁴⁷ As Spacks articulates, in the eighteenth century "reputation is social currency," and for many women the risk of a reputation ruined by gossip was too high to permit "sexual deviation: the resulting scandal [would] destroy their reputations and exclude them 'from more than half the joys of life.'"⁴⁸ For courtesans, gossip extends beyond exposing a lost reputation—it has the power to affect their income and their pursuit of upper-class femininity.

When the public discussions contributing to Fisher's persona do not reflect her professional self-image, her own performance is undermined. Fisher is compelled to search for work in the theater as a result of her poor business prospects due to the circulation of malicious rumors started by Don Harrisino, a man who publishes and distributes a city directory listing nearby available prostitutes.⁴⁹ When Harrisino suggests that Fisher print her name in his book; the courtesan adamantly refuses, offended that Harrisino believes she would consider stooping to his suggested method of securing customers. She does not want him to represent her, but cannot prevent him from spreading his own version of her to the public. Insulted by Fisher's refusal, Harrisino whispers rumors in the ears of her potential customers: he bashes her extravagance, insists her high prices have ruined many men, and insinuates that she is infected with venereal disease by calling attention to "the doubtful

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip*, (New York: Knopf, 1985).

⁴⁸ Spacks, *Gossip*, 31-32.

⁴⁹ Rosenthal, "Introduction," *xiii*. Harrisino appears to be modeled after Jack Harris, an eighteenth-century pimp who wrote "Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies," a similar publication to the one described here.

state of her health.”⁵⁰ As a result, Fisher’s potential clients begin to avoid her.

Unable to understand why she can no longer attract any business, Fisher “accordingly purchase[s] some very gay and costly dresses, with which she appear[s] in every public place.”⁵¹ Just as she considers the benefits of imitating the countess’s riding habit, Fisher’s only solution to restoring her clientele is to express herself the way she wishes to be recognized: as a wealthy woman. Nevertheless, Harrisino’s rumors persist and while Fisher is “the most conspicuous figure in the place, she [is] always the least taken notice of”—the situation that eventually prompts her search for work as an actress.⁵² Regardless of the way Fisher dresses or acts, the misinformation Harrisino spreads alters people’s perception of her. Spacks observes that the power of gossip derives from “the illusion of mastery gained through taking imaginative possession of another’s experience,” and is used to “manipulate the subject’s reputation, to generate feelings of superiority.”⁵³ After Fisher rejects his initial proposal, Harrisino uses gossip, a method of control which Fisher cannot prevent, to secure some sense of power over the courtesan’s lived experience through her public persona. Harrisino’s rumors in a sense “take possession” of Fisher; she dresses and acts differently because his words alter people’s perceptions of her and therefore change Fisher’s experience of her profession. Rather like the warning that Walker extends to the other male authors of *Authentick Memoirs*, Harrisino’s male perspective means the other clients accept his proposal that Fisher is a common prostitute, marked by her overpriced and infected, yet still purchasable, body.

While Harrisino’s rumors show that Fisher has little control over her public persona, her refusal to number among those in his directory indicates her desire to brand herself based on her superiority over the average prostitute. When Harrisino approaches Fisher for permission to put her name in his book, he stresses that “it would be very advantageous for her, as he would always give her the preference, whenever a new face was called for.”⁵⁴ The prospect of an extended client base and increased income does not tempt Fisher enough to outweigh her aversion to Harrisino’s potential representation; she detests the thought of openly listing her services alongside those of streetwalkers.⁵⁵ Firm in her belief that an association with streetwalkers will detract value from her social aspirations, Fisher separates herself from those prostitutes who are available to “the common convenience of every abandoned profligate”; she wishes to attract a certain class of clientele that does not include the numerous “profligates” who read Harrisino’s book.⁵⁶ Fisher’s desire to imitate an upper-class lifestyle contradicts Harrisino’s presentation of the prostitutes on his list; it refines her profession, makes her more appealing because of her exclusivity, and raises the value of her services by providing her with wealthy clients who help her perform her desired class. Yet she cannot maintain this performance on her own, especially when the gossip of people like Harrisino affects her social elevation.

In *Juvenile Adventures* the gossip and rumors that spread about Fisher inevitably form and feed off her public persona. At the time of the narrative’s publication in 1759, debates about who Fisher was, or pretended to be, were a popular topic of conversation; her celebrity status inspired conversations, portraits, nursery rhymes, songs, poetry, and long-form prose narratives. That same year, Fisher wrote to *The Public Advertiser* in response to the publication of a narrative

⁵⁰“*Juvenile Adventures*,” 126.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 121.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Spacks, *Gossip*, 22-23.

⁵⁴“*Juvenile Adventures*,” 120.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶Walker, “*Authentick Memoirs*,” 60-62. Both courtesans choose to associate with upper-class clients and turn clients away in an attempt to limit their professional contact with lower classes. When a farmer visiting London wants to hire Salisbury, she blatantly turns him down, trying to maintain the reputation that all of her “intrigues have been chiefly with Persons of higher Rank than” he and berates him for his “uncommon Impudence, to use one of her Appearance and Quality as [he] did” whereupon she orders her “servant to bid the Rustick be gone.”

claiming to be her memoirs. The courtesan complained that she had been “abused in public papers” and “exposed in print-shops” by people whose opinions she felt did not have “the slightest foundation in truth”; Fisher clearly believed that these representations did not reflect her own desired performance.⁵⁷ In *Juvenile Adventures*, possibly the very narrative Fisher references in the *Public Advertiser*, a satirical version of Fisher’s letter ridicules courtesans for their belief that “however *indiscreet* their conduct,” they “should be secure from censure”— a condemnation of Fisher’s desire to be reputable despite her reputation.⁵⁸

After mocking Fisher’s indignation at unauthorized representations of herself, the author takes the time to track the “reports now current to [Fisher’s] disadvantage” to a source whose “falsity is notorious”: women’s gossip.⁵⁹ This characterization of female gossip functions to push Fisher into the marginalized identity of prostitute and identify the “slippage” that prevents her from being an upper-class woman. According to Spacks, gossip has the power to “invoke a female alliance” between the gossipers, which automatically excludes Fisher as the subject of those discussions.⁶⁰ In the early eighteenth century, gossip was also associated with upper-class women who “found themselves deprived of significant economic function” and “gossip[ed] because they ha[d] nothing better to do.”⁶¹ Fisher’s exclusion from their alliance positions her outside their social group; in the time those women presumably spend gossiping, Fisher occupies herself with the same trade that prevents her from joining the women’s circle. While this characterization of gossip serves to separate Fisher from the society of upper-class women, the narrative’s depictions of Harrisino’s gossip and the women’s gossip about Fisher take a noticeably different tone. The author blames the women’s gossip for the creation of an exaggerated version of Fisher as a woman full of vice, claiming they “invented fifty false reports concerning [Fisher], to make her character more odious than that of a woman of pleasure need to be[...]to render her vanity insupportable, her pride insatiable and her avarice without bounds.”⁶² Though Harrisino’s rumors are malicious, their vengeance gives them a purpose, whereas the women’s gossip is seemingly the result of an idle desire to spread falsehoods.

The author of *Juvenile Adventures* condemns the women’s gossip to separate his text from those associations.⁶³ In the eighteenth century, women’s gossip was considered more dangerous than men’s.⁶⁴ In a discussion of cautionary tales, Spacks observes in the “linkage of loose talk with women, suggestions that gossip implies credulity, betrayal, and exaggeration.”⁶⁵ To absolve all the male voices in the narrative from responsibility for any falsity in the representations of Fisher, the author blames all disadvantageous reports and inaccuracies on women’s gossip and on Fisher herself. The author’s ventriloquism of the erased voices of Fisher herself and the gossiping women validates his prejudiced conception of women; if the false stories can be blamed on women, then the

⁵⁷C. Fisher, “Odd Advertisements. From the Public Advertiser, March 30, 1759,” *The Annual Register, Or, A View of the History, Politics, And Literature for the Year*. 8th ed. (London, England: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1792), 168.

The first volume of *Juvenile Adventures* is one of two narratives about Fisher published in 1759, the same year as her letter in the *Public Advertiser*; “Art. 8, 26, The Juvenile Adventures of Miss Kitty F-r.” *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal*, vol. 20, ed. Ralph Griffiths (London, 1759), 276, 379. Fisher’s was not the only critique of *Juvenile Adventures* accuracy. Of the first volume *The Monthly Review* wrote “Miserable, lying, obscene trash; imposed upon the public for the genuine story of a noted young prostitute” and of the second volume that it is “as foolish, as false, and preposterous, though not so obscene, as the former.”

⁵⁸“*Juvenile Adventures*,” 149.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 146.

⁶⁰Spacks, *Gossip*, 35.

⁶¹Spacks, *Gossip*, 39, 41.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³Aside from legitimate memoirs, the majority of eighteenth-century prostitute narratives published with a credited author claimed male authorship. Though “*Juvenile Adventures*” is anonymous, the male perspective it presents and the libertine form it takes likely indicate a male voice.

⁶⁴Spacks, *Gossip*, 38.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

male voices are more reliable and authoritative. Without directly quoting the women, the author claims full knowledge of their words and the context in which they speak, perhaps to disassociate his narrative from the negative associations of female gossip and permit his use of their voices to further his characterization of Fisher.

As Reynolds's portraits suggest, Fisher's fame exposed her to the representations of a wider public. The rumored occasion of Fisher's fall from her horse in a public park is one of the most frequently repeated. As do most versions of the story, *Juvenile Adventures* focuses on the view Fisher's flying skirts offered the park's curious spectators who then spread the tale until all "the streets and lanes re-echoed with Miss Kitty F—r's downfall."⁶⁶ Despite the writer's continued insistence that one can trace any false rumors to "female tongues," the event is so widely discussed that "[e]very coffee-house," that spot reserved for upper-class men "[became] a public oratory, where the merits and demerits of the cause were stated and opposed."⁶⁷ Fisher's fame opens her actions and intentions up to debate and other people's personal opinions of her are "publicly exhibited" in the form of "songs, lampoons, and epigrams [...] and prints of the scene," which draw so much attention that the "song of 'Kitty Fell' [is] in every one's mouth."⁶⁸ The speculations of these other individuals who speak or write about her collectively contribute to her public persona, though Fisher is excluded from those conversations just as she is from the social alliance of the women who gossip about her. But this lack of exclusive control does not discourage her from pursuing her desired performance of femininity.

Fashion Forward Femininity: Veiling The Woman of Pleasure In The Girl of Fashion⁶⁹

As Salisbury and Fisher do not, in fact, control their social standing, despite their performances of upper-class mannerisms, and while any social elevation they do achieve is temporary, it is notable that the courtesans continue to repeat their imitation of upper-class femininity. This repetition fits Judith Butler's definition of gender as performative: created through repeated actions, or citations of behavior, that imitate socially constructed norms.⁷⁰ In this sense, Salisbury's and Fisher's constructed performances, rather than an intentional manipulation of their clients, are inseparable from the upper-class femininity to which they have been exposed; this connection also reveals the performativity of their imitations of class. The women's respective upbringings introduced them to elevated lifestyles through their observations of the behaviors society associated with upper-class women. It appears that Salisbury's and Fisher's shared goal within their repeated performances of upper-class behaviors is to be seen and interacted with in a similar way to the upper-class women they continue to observe. This performance only temporarily produces the desired effect and, as a result, Salisbury and Fisher repeat their rendering of gender and class based on the way their experiences have conditioned them.

Salisbury's and Fisher's early exposure to the clothing of people wealthier than themselves contributes to their later gender and class performance as courtesans. From their childhood, both women are well-acquainted with fine clothes through their work in the garment industry—Salisbury is apprenticed to a seamstress at age nine, and adolescent Fisher holds a position in a millinery shop—and it provides them with the opportunity to observe and handle other women's clothing. Though Salisbury's family is not wealthy and constantly grapples with the "Frowns of Fortune,"

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ "Juvenile Adventures," 139.

⁷⁰ Judith Butler. *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, (New York, Routledge, 1991), 28.

Salisbury's mother owns a prized "Stuff-Sattinet" petticoat, "the richest Garment [she] had ever been Mistress of."⁷¹ Perhaps in a desire to imitate her own mother's grandest attire, or informed by women's clothing which she had seen at the seamstress's shop, Salisbury steals her mother's gown and alters it to fit herself so she can wear it to a ball. The author introduces this occasion of the theft and donning of another's clothing as the "budding of [Salisbury's] Puberty," a marker of the very moment that "SALLY commenc'd Woman."⁷² In anticipation of his characterization of Salisbury as a scheming, dissembling prostitute, the author links Salisbury's sexual awakening to the idea of becoming someone else— her mother at her richest, or the women she has seen in the shop. Salisbury's first step towards that imitation of upper-class femininity begins with her first cunning act: the theft of another person's clothes.

While the significance the author places on her desire for an upper-class lifestyle represents his first attempt to label her performance as "mimicry" with the craftiness and deviance commonly associated with prostitutes, it also accounts for her desire to wear fine clothes as an expression of her femininity. Salisbury's childhood exposure to a lifestyle grander than her own instills within her a desire for that experience. Salisbury is drawn to the "richest" item her mother wears and the first personal "Use she ma[akes] of her Needle" outside of the shop is in aid of her attempt to imitate the most lavish femininity she has seen through her available skill set.⁷³ Walker speculates that Salisbury's actions are due to her "ambition always to be Fine, in order to attract the Hearts as well as the Eyes of her little Votaries"; though he attributes the stolen and altered dress to Salisbury's intention to secure the attention of her male followers, it is the inclination "always to be fine" that motivates her to dress herself in the highest quality clothing she can find.⁷⁴ Since class is a performance, for Salisbury "to be fine" is to dress as and, therefore, to feel like and be treated as an upper-class woman; her attempts to gain male lovers are, like her needlework, simply a tool to assist her performance of upper-class femininity.

Fisher's work as a milliner is not her first exposure to upper-class clothes and mannerisms and the role of clothing in gender and class performances. Fisher's father educated her in a manner above her own class and dressed her "like the child of a nobleman, which could not fail making her be taken notice of."⁷⁵ When she later quarrels with Harrisino, Fisher expresses her belief that the essence of an action, even "the most indecent action [,] might be glossed over by the manner of performing it."⁷⁶ Fisher's upbringing conditions her to believe that class can be performed through dress and mannerisms, as demonstrated in her insistence that performance can alter an action. Fisher's later interactions with women like the Countess de Peeporo illustrate the marked difference between her own position working in a shop and that of other women whose economic position can sustain their taste for fine clothing.⁷⁷

Fisher learns how difficult that gap is to navigate from her father. Merely "a silver chaser by trade," he exceeds the family's financial abilities with the extravagant costumes he purchases for his daughter and "by the time Kitty was three months old, John was upon the brink of going to a jail."⁷⁸ For the author, John's obsession with constructing his daughter's wealthy appearance exemplifies the consequence of men's participation in 'false' presentations of women's femininity in the wrong class: he runs himself into debt and he contributes to his daughter's path to prostitution by inculcating her with a manner of thinking that conditions her to do anything she can to appear upper-class. Since Fisher's father willingly bankrupts himself to dress her up as an upper-class

⁷¹ Walker, "Authentick Memoirs," 12.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Juvenile Adventures," 98.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 71,72.

girl, it follows that an older Fisher uses all tools available to her to maintain her status as a courtesan and to seek out recognition as an upper-class woman. John's financial mistakes also instill within Fisher an awareness that she cannot be fully upper-class without capital. As a child, Fisher's outward semblance of wealth almost provides this required financial stability, but her father prevents it. Struck by the young Fisher's appearance, an upper-class woman offers to take Fisher off her father's hands "if he should like to see her shine in a more elevated sphere than that of a mechanic's daughter."⁷⁹ Yet John is not willing to give his daughter up and "all Kitty's prospects of grandeur [disappear] with the lady."⁸⁰ After losing this chance to live the upper-class lifestyle her dress has destined her for, Fisher's financial status and her father's reluctance to grant her real social mobility limit subsequent opportunities for her success.

From the way her father nearly goes bankrupt when he dresses her in fine clothing, Fisher gains an awareness of the necessity for financial support to obtain any semblance of an upper-class lifestyle. The upper-class woman who offers to take in young Fisher does not have the chance to assist directly in Fisher's social elevation, but Salisbury's and Fisher's interactions with other women do indirectly inform the courtesans' performances of their gender and class. In fact, it is often women in their industry, like Mrs S, who influence the way they perform prostitution to bring themselves as close as possible to being recognized for their performances of upper-class femininity. Just as Fisher observed women buying clothing in the shops, her strategy for achieving her goal of being recognized as an upper-class woman is formed by her impressions of other courtesans. In this way, her performance of gender is not only an imitation of upper-class women in mainstream society but also of fellow courtesans—those who used the same resources she has available to her to accomplish a fleeting version of the recognition she desires.

Fisher observes two courtesans, Miss Murrio and Miss Cupero, who seem to have accomplished her own goals.⁸¹ Murrio and Cupero have "passed through a series of prostituted adventures from low extraction, and [...] arrived at the point of keeping their equipages, and being the general toasts of the gay and polite"—their situation indicates that they enjoy a more stable source of income and recognition from the upper-classes than Fisher does at this point in the narrative.⁸² Though the customary end of Fisher's and Salisbury's client relationships point to the looming transience of these courtesans' social elevation (Murrio has "no certain support" from any one person and Cupero relies on one doting old knight), both Murrio and Cupero became "general toasts of gay and polite" society through their "prostituted adventures."⁸³ These women succeed in becoming, if not accepted as one of the "gay and polite" themselves, at least among their preferred company. For Fisher, the "example of these two women [is a] greater incentive[...] to prostitution" than any other factor.⁸⁴ Fisher notes a plausible opportunity to sidestep her father's financial failings in Cupero's and Murrio's use of prostitution as a tool for gaining qualified social elevation. Both Salisbury and Fisher are able to recognize the limitations of their socioeconomic position within eighteenth-century social structures and strategically elevate themselves within the ranks of prostitution—though not real social mobility, it allows them to pursue the lifestyle they desire.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Rosenthal, *Nightwalkers*, 99. Cupero and Murrio are likely meant to be Fisher's contemporary courtesans Lucy Cooper and Fanny Murray.

⁸² "Juvenile Adventures," 99.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

Approaching the Limit

Even with the tools that allow them to move toward social elevation, the authors' and the public's identification of Salisbury's and Fisher's "slippage" limits the courtesans' ability to pass as upper-class women. Within the constrictions of the social expectations and structures set for them as courtesans, Fisher and Salisbury gain access to those spaces where Murrio and Cupero became the toasts of the gay and polite. When "A Person of the first Rank" throws a ball at his house, Salisbury, "very desirous to be at it [...] prevail'd with one of her Gallants to procure her a Ticket," whereupon she attends "finely rig'd out in a noble Suit of Black Velvet, and a considerable quantity of rich Jewels."⁸⁵ Salisbury's influence over her client allows her to mingle temporarily with the upper-class adorned in her "noble" suit and the "rich" jewels—the first step in her imitation of the nobility and richness of that class. Once the courtesans access those spaces, they must not only dress the part, but also conduct themselves as polite society considers appropriate for upper-class women. At the ball, Salisbury abandons her tendency to speak coarsely as she "kn[ows] better than to use such gross Epithets among so noble an Assembly."⁸⁶ To maintain her presence in the ballroom, she must supplement her careful speech with the proper forms of physical movement. Butler argues that gender presentation is manifested "through the gesture, the move, the gait."⁸⁷ One of the women Salisbury sits with at the ball asks the courtesan to dance with her and soon discovers, much to her amusement, that Salisbury's "Talent does not lie in the French-Dances" as she "danc'd consumedly ill, and with an awkward graceless Grace, hobbling worse than a Welsh Milk-Wench."⁸⁸ Salisbury's lack of training and upbringing clearly sets her apart: it reveals her class to be closer to a "milk-wench" than any of the ladies in the room.⁸⁹

Salisbury's botched dance leads to more revelations than just her class. Her partner teases Salisbury and ironically "compliment[s] her upon her fine Mien and Performance, asking her who was her Dancing-Master," though fully aware that she did not have one unlike most of the women present.⁹⁰ The courtesan irritably replies that though the lady may "not approve of [Salisbury's] Manner of Dancing" Salisbury herself knows that the lady's husband "admires [her own] Dancing above all Things, and has often told [her], that he had much rather Dance, or— (speaking mighty plain English) with [Salisbury] than with [the lady] at any time."⁹¹ Salisbury's extended response to the taunts about her dancing abilities exposes several husbands of the women in the room and these "Rubs stop'd all the Ladies Mouths at once, and not one would venture upon her again."⁹² Salisbury's speech reveals her profession and demonstrates that, had her dancing skills been considered sufficient, the courtesan's partner and the other women in the room may have continued to see her as they did initially: indistinguishable from themselves.⁹³

⁸⁵Walker, "Authentick Memoirs," 56.

⁸⁶Walker, "Authentick Memoirs," 57.

⁸⁷Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, 28.

⁸⁸Walker, "Authentick Memoirs," 57.

⁸⁹"Juvenile Adventures," 83. Fisher's unique education above her class status gave her the ability to dance well and made other women feel threatened by her, but Salisbury did not have this training. Fisher had many "opportunities of shewing her superior skill in dancing, and so the young ladies began to look upon her as a very formidable rival."

⁹⁰Walker, "Authentick Memoirs," 57.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³Spacks, *Gossip*, 40. One eighteenth-century clergyman, He informed a group of young women that if they "allow [them]sel[ves] to dance freely [...they] may inadvertently reveal [their] sexuality." From this perspective, dance has the potential to reveal a woman's sexuality. Spacks speculates that this warning occurred when "the clergyman project[ed] his disturbance onto" the dancing women and compares it to expectations of control over female sexual passion. This points to the dance floor as a space in which women are watched for signs of their sexuality. In *Authentick Memoirs* this a space where Salisbury inadvertently reveals her profession—not directly through her dance, but in the conversations resulting from it.

Illustrated in moments like Salisbury's incompetent dancing and inappropriate conversation, the instances of recognition that result from the courtesans' performances of upper-class femininity are short-lived and indicate the authors' anxiety in the narratives about upper-class women's ability to recognize a prostitute. When a "genteely-dress'd" woman observes Salisbury being carried in her sedan chair "dress'd like a little Princess, in Crimson Velvet, with abundance of Jewels about her," she initially recognizes Salisbury as a gentlewoman.⁹⁴ Addressing Salisbury as her "sweet Ladyship," the woman requests permission to gaze at the courtesan because she finds Salisbury's "Mien, Person, and Dress perfectly Charm[ing]."⁹⁵ Like Reynolds's portraits where Fisher's image can be stared at until the markers of her career distinguish her from the other women painted in the same style, the genteel woman's extended exposure to Salisbury's performance of upper-class femininity provides the woman with a chance to identify Salisbury's "slippage" despite initially being charmed by the courtesan's appearance.

Stunned by her discovery of Salisbury's occupation and her own inability to identify it immediately, the woman speculates that Salisbury's appearance is a trick. The courtesan's occupation should prevent her from appearing like a wealthy upper-class woman, yet Salisbury's imitation of upper-class femininity is so successful that she "looks as much like a Woman of Reputation, as any [the woman] ever saw in [her] Life."⁹⁶ Instead of "sweet ladyship," the woman now refers to Salisbury as a "vile Whore in all this Finery" in an expression of her displeasure at the resemblance between Salisbury's expression of upper-class femininity and her own. The woman's immediate reversal of opinion about the courtesan demonstrates similar anxieties to those Perry observes in fictional virtuous women in response to the barely perceptible differences between themselves and fallen women.⁹⁷ Deborah Anna Logan extends this sentiment to her argument that literary characters whose class and morality "resist easy categorization arouse middle-class anxieties, like 'the fear that respectability is a masquerade' [...] and that the possibility for the fallen to rise by association implies the possibility for the respectable to fall."⁹⁸ Like Walker's warning to help other men identify the courtesans as conniving prostitutes, this woman's vehement condemnation of Salisbury's performance as mimicry models the author's insistence that upper-class women should keep their respectability sanctified by rejecting any association with fallen women, even those whose appearance mirrors their own.⁹⁹

The narratives' constant identification of the courtesans' "slippage" forces them to repeatedly re-establish their gender and class through their conditioned conceptions of upper-class femininity. Through this process, the courtesans create a new identity that constantly approaches their desired experience of upper-class femininity, but never grants them the stable recognition necessary to maintain it. Towards the end of *Juvenile Adventures*, Fisher stabilizes her finances and, as a result, nearly reaches a recognition of her upper-class status. One of her clients proposes to the "members of the Faro club, whom he had heard profess a great regard for [Fisher], to make her an allowance out of their winnings," a proposition which will be "advantageous, [...] enable her to purchase an annuity for her life," and provide economic stability.¹⁰⁰ Because of her occupation, Fisher's nearness

⁹⁴Walker, "Authentick Memoirs," 44.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶*Ibid.* 45.

⁹⁷Perry, "Good Girls and Fallen Women," 91.

⁹⁸Logan, "Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse," 31.

⁹⁹"Authentick Memoirs," 28, 29. In response to the Knight of the Garter, a former client who has spread rumors about her infamous behavior, Salisbury complains that he "can no way reflect upon [her] Reputation, without casting an equal Odium upon the Memory of [his] own Mother." The courtesan calls attention to the Garter's sibling who was born out of wedlock, but she also equates her own social value to the mother of a knight. Just as the courtesan's identity as an upper-class woman is constantly questioned, she points out that those women recognized for their upper-class femininity also behave like prostitutes.

¹⁰⁰"*Juvenile Adventures*," 141.

to being recognized as an upper-class woman disturbs the already precarious class boundaries of the eighteenth century. To ensure Fisher is still identifiable as a prostitute despite her economic stability, the author calls attention to Fisher's pursuit of one of her subscribers as a potential client despite her annuity of "five and thirty pistoles a week [being] thought a very sufficient income" that she "might [...] have lived affluently upon."¹⁰¹ Using military metaphors to present Fisher's actions as a strategic attack, the author notes Fisher's crafty "plan of a regular siege upon the count's desires" in which she "ogled, sighed, and breathed nought but love," and "disclosed her neck, with her pouting orbs" until the "garrison surrendered" and left "the spoils of this conquest" in the form of "three hundred pistoles in notes" as an addition to her existing annuity.¹⁰² Fisher's tactical maneuvers win the battle—she gains a client, her finances are finally stable, and she has surplus money to purchase expensive items. Yet she seems to ultimately have lost the war—in her public manipulation of multiple men, and transactionalization of her own body, her actions expose her to condemnation for her use of prostitution to gain social status.

By repeatedly identifying the courtesans' imitations of upper-class femininity as unsuitable mimics due to the "slippage" that marks them as prostitutes, the authors of *Juvenile Adventures* and *Authentick Memoirs* imply that the women manipulate their image with a conniving purpose. Despite the defamatory agenda of these narratives, the courtesans' repeated gender and class performances still stem from conditioned behaviors, pointing to the performative nature of their imitation. The body that the women strive to have recognized for its upper-class femininity paradoxically reveals their role as prostitutes: their available method of social elevation—the selling of their bodies—also prevents them from being seen as upper-class women. Thus, as Salisbury and Fisher constantly repeat their desired gender and class performances, they subsequently reveal their careers. The authors' constant identification of this revelation as "slippage" is not merely an attempt to prove that the women's performance is deceptive; their actions echo Bhabha's claim that mimicry represents the colonizers' desire for a "recognizable Other" to maintain the "dominant strategic function of colonial power."¹⁰³ As the viewers of Reynolds' paintings, the authors are actively maintaining existing structures of power that depend on their ability to differentiate between a prostitute and an upper-class woman. The moments in which the recognition of courtesans' upper-class femininity mirrors that of respectable women, though fleeting, are enough to trigger the universal anxiety of those in power: a fear that the fragile balance that favors them will be upturned and the colonizers will be indistinguishable from the subjects.

In a parallel to Cleopatra's consumption of a pearl dissolved in vinegar in *Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl*, a rumor circulated that when the infamous Casanova met Fisher in 1763 he was fascinated by the stories of her "swallow[ing] a hundred-pound note on a slice of buttered bread"; the note was apparently given to her by her supposed lover Sir Richard Atkins.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Cleopatra's careless display of wealth, Fisher's own exhibition represents that which she can obtain as a courtesan: the promise of a temporary economic boost that will set her apart from other prostitutes, but will not let her forget the limits impressed on the resulting social elevation by the nature of her profession. This liminal space Fisher occupies is manifested in the various additions to her public persona in 1759: *Juvenile Adventures* was published, Joshua Reynolds painted two of her portraits, and Fisher's complaint about the contributions to her public persona appeared in the *Public Advertiser*. Fisher's name and some version of her story appeared in the libertine prostitute narrative that characterizes her as the conventional, scheming, manipulative prostitute of the sub-genre in the same year that a prestigious painter publicly released her portraits in the style

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man," 85-92.

¹⁰⁴ Bradford Mudge, "'Enchanting Witchery': Sir Joshua Reynolds's Portrait of Kitty Fisher as Cleopatra," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 40, (2016), 48.

reserved for wealthy upper-class women. But the narrative itself reveals the inaccuracies with its representation of the courtesan, and the portraits still reveal the “slippage” that prevents her from being recognized as an upper-class woman because of her profession. Fisher is neither a typical prostitute nor a typical upper-class woman. In *Juvenile Adventures* and *Authentick Memoirs*, the courtesans’ performative femininity creates a new identity for themselves, one unique to them as courtesans. This identity is asymptotic—constantly approaching a stable recognition of upper-class femininity, but never reaching that stability because their performance is constantly being marked as mimicry.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of how successful Fisher’s and Salisbury’s performances of upper-class femininity are, their social elevation is ephemeral because, in addition to the lack of control they have over their performances, eighteenth-century conceptions of prostitution and performances of upper-class femininity are polarizing, leaving courtesans in the asymptotic, liminal space between the two identities. Herein lies the paradox: the courtesans’ bodies, made purchasable as the only available form of economic support to elevate the women near the upper class, cannot fully access that summit because they have been bought, no matter how lavishly they are clothed.

¹⁰⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), “asymptote, n.” Asymptotes are lines which approach nearer and nearer to a given curve, but do not meet it within a finite distance. Asymptotic spaces are “comprised between two lines, which being infinitely prolonged do never meet.”

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