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Mounica V. Kota Ms.

Oglethorpe University, mkota@oglethorpe.edu

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Gender and Class Differences in 19th Century French Prostitution

Mounica Kota
Dr. Sandler

Differences in class and gender presented vast dissimilarities in the lives of prostitutes in 19th century France, especially in regards to adherence to regulationism, treatment by police officials, and a general standard of living. Within the gender divisions in prostitution, class differences defined the type of clientele and amount of legal accountability that the prostitutes would be subject to--largely in the favor of upper-class clientele. However, ultimately, prostitution was deemed the domain of women who were meant to serve as outlets for the sexual desires of men- gender, despite class differences, played the more important role, as whether of high class standings or not, female prostitutes were still fundamentally demeaned in society, more so than the male prostitute.

I should clarify here that class and gender are not, of course, the only factors to consider when discussing prostitution in 19th century France. There are many other dynamics at play, such as relative age, urban or rural origins, nativity to the country, race, and other such factors that maintain surely vital roles in this social demographic. Naturally, considering all this, intersectionality (the idea that systems of oppression are held together in intersectional parts of society and must therefore be treated as such depending on race, sex, class, etc.) must be maintained. However, gender and class are some of the most defining elements in the situation. Though intersectionality must be considered in gendered discourse regarding prostitution, specifically during a time period in which social order was such a high priority, I will be focusing on only two main intersectional themes for the purposes of this paper: gender and class, and on how gender was essentially the most defining factor in the lives of prostitutes at the time.

Parent- DuChâtelet, famous Parisian sexologist, made a statement that accurately reflected a common belief during the nineteenth century: “Prostitutes are inevitable, where men live together in large concentrations, as drains and refuse dumps... the man who has desires will pervert your daughters and servant girls... he will sow discord in the home.”¹ This notion that prostitution was there for the carnal needs of men was nothing new- prostitution is commonly referred to as “the world’s oldest profession” in a history of patriarchal ruling. However, nineteenth century France was experiencing an age of intense urbanization, breaking from early modern and policies associated with it. With urbanization then came a fear of loss of identity, the idea that in a world that was quickly being taken over by industrialization and the fast-paced work force lifestyle that it created, the concrete identities could no longer be maintained. This was especially true within the working classes, where gender constructions were broken as women worked more and more to meet the rapid needs of urbanization and support their families, altering the notion of women belonging to the private sphere. The unsettling nature of these changes, and the exponential rate at which they were occurring, caused noticeable shifts in the social demographic. While industrialization made life more predictable and presented a level of social organization that didn’t exist in such a level before, it also presented a lack of self expression and individuality that resulted in a high suicide and homicide rate, especially in metropolitan areas, compared to rural locations. The homicidal tendencies that were typically associated with masculine aggressiveness reached a peak at this time, when men were known to take out frustrations on their wives

¹ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 4

and families.² In order to avert this phenomenon, prostitution was encouraged as a diversion for these men to be able to take out pent up frustration in a sexual fashion so as to spare the women of the domestic sphere from this result of urbanization.

The protection of society was, in fact, one of the focus points in the regulationist argument--the idea that prostitution must exist, but be contained and enclosed to a point where the “decent folk” of society would not be influenced to act in a similar fashion. The confining ideas of regulationism played a heavy role in the first half of the nineteenth century and made the lives of working class women miserable, as they were the ones that were mostly subject to regulationist laws. Fundamentally, regulationism was characterized by three principles: the necessity of creating an *enclosed milieu* that would be “invisible to children, [and] honest women,”³ the supervision of said milieu under authorities to which the system would provide full transparency, and, finally, the compartmentalization of the milieu, so that with hierarchies and organization, observation is perfected and power of authority is strengthened. In this way, French officials sought to contain prostitution by maintaining complete and total control of the system. However, the methods by which this was accomplished were harsh, not within the confines of law, and really only forced upon lower class women.

The regulation of prostitutes’ health and standards were a natural and vital part of the system, and were enacted in order to “protect clients from theft, violence, and venereal diseases,”⁴ not with any particular care for the women themselves. “In the

² Abdul Qaiyum Lodhi and Charles Tilly, “Urbanization, Crime, and Collective Violence in 19th-Century France,” *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1973), 296-318

³ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, 9

⁴ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 28

nineteenth century,” historian Jill Harsin says, “the control of prostitution became a matter of deliberate decisions to violate systematically the rights of prostitutes as well as women who were merely suspected of prostitution.”⁵ Women were forced to submit to mandatory health checks periodically, depending on their location, during which “the vulva, the vagina, the neck of the womb, the lips, and the inside of the mouth”⁶ were examined, often with forced consent and with little care to the delicacy of the examinations. In **Figure 1**, a painting (one of many that came from France the 19th century), two women are seen submitting to one of these examinations. Their heads are almost bowed, and their faces resigned as they hitch up their dresses in a submissive gesture that the dehumanized, mechanical nature of the system has elicited from them. A doctor in Paris, Dr. Clerc, “boasted that he could examine a woman every thirty seconds,”⁷ knocking out hundreds of checks a day with little regard to the women actually involved in them. Aside from the degradation of these women, with the formulaic and degrading nature of these checks, many illnesses went undiagnosed and unnoticed. Ultimately, the results of these check ups were not for the benefit of the women who were diseased, but the process gave a tighter grip of power to authorities. The police were extremely wary of and feared unregistered prostitutes more than the registered ones because they existed outside of their control, which was the fundamental aspect of regulationism. Police were constantly “on alert for suspected prostitutes, and in their haste to find them, they frequently violated the rights of working class women found

⁵ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 29

⁶ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, 96

⁷ Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute; Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 86

in public.”⁸ However, they were able to get away with their actions because these women were “members of the working class, made vulnerable by their economic powerlessness”.⁹ These women were recorded under the official category of “public girl,” which gave women an image from which they could rarely escape, whether they were actually prostitutes or simply working-class women who were falsely accused.

Aside from the mandatory registration, the increase in regulation and control of authority figures meant that lower class prostitutes were forced to work in the most desperate conditions. It was the norm for women “to work even during their menstrual periods; [as] the keeper used skillful makeup to conceal from the client the condition of his partner.”¹⁰ These women also had to work despite suffering from venereal diseases, especially when demand was heavy, at which point some keepers would use makeup that meant “applying small pieces of colored gold leaf to lesions and carmine on the sexual organs of inmates suffering from gonorrhea or syphilis”¹¹ so that the women could still work. These kinds of cover-ups would then leave the sick prostitute unable to be treated until the effects wore off, leaving them sitting in waiting rooms for hours so that they could submit to mandatory check-ups. Even if a prostitute became pregnant, they were forced to continue working, so that men could specifically request pregnant women to satisfy their desires. In **Figure 2**, a depiction of the system is seen in this painting of women sitting, stripped, while a lavishly dressed gentleman client chooses which one he

⁸ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 63

⁹ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 63

¹⁰ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, 142

¹¹ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, 142

most prefers. The women are entirely naked, which though not the case in all brothels, is an artistic depiction of the dehumanizing nature of the whole process.

When prostitutes were discovered to have venereal diseases that they simply could not function with anymore, they were sent not to hospitals, but to prisons where they were rarely looked after. Parent-DuChâtelet claimed that prisons were an “indispensable element in the system,” meant to “inspire in the prostitute a *permanent terror*”¹² which would then result in fear-induced order in the brothels and system. The most generic stereotype or prevailing notion about prostitution at the time was that women of lower classes, ones riddled with poverty and left without a husband, were then led to sell their bodies out of desperation to support their families. This is not entirely true- “women of almost every background turned to prostitution because the social structures of the time created an enormous demand and, by the same token, a profitable industry.”¹³ However, there is truth to the concept of the Desperate Poor Woman, as seen in **Figure 3**, a chart depicting the occupations of most prostitutes. In this chart, servant girls consistently form the highest percentage of registered prostitutes. In fact a theory that is highly discussed is that the bourgeoisie set about making a necessary prostitution demand by purposefully giving low pay to women so that a reserve of prostitutes was created in order to maintain “the bourgeois family and the virtue of bourgeois girls.”¹⁴

¹² Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, 13

¹³ Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire; Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, 163

¹⁴ Jurgen Kock and Allan Mitchell, *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1993), 35

To put this notion of the poor, starving woman prostitute into cultural context, I cite *Les Misérables*, which was published in 1862. The infamous musical has made its rounds around the world multiple times and is widely considered one of the best and well-known plays to date. In *Les Misérables*, Victor Hugo drew on and infused these societal notions of the “poor prostitute”. His character Fantine depicts Hugo’s criticism of the social structures that lead women to sell themselves. In *Les Misérables*, the audience is presented with Fantine (**Figure 4**), a poor, anonymous woman, not knowing her parentage and having been deserted by her lover. She is forced to raise her child alone, and has to resort to extreme measures to do so, such as selling her hair, her teeth, and ultimately, herself. “Quite literally, her social conditions dismember her.”¹⁵ Hugo does not hold back on the descriptions of how gruesome she ends up, mentioning how “the corners of her mouth were stained with blood, and there was a black hole where her two front teeth had been.”³

Two other characters, Eponine and Azelma, are also forced to contribute to family finances through theft and prostitution and have been reduced to a “species of impure yet innocent monsters”⁴ at a very young age. Once again, Hugo does not pull punches in his descriptions of Eponine, describing her almost as one of the living dead, with her “bony shoulders protruding from the blouse, a blond and lymphatic pallor, dirty shoulder blades, red hands, the mouth open and sickly, some teeth missing, the eyes dull, bold, and drooping, the form of a misshapen young girl and the stare of a corrupted old woman.”³ In a book full of social criticism, this maintains one of the three main aspects

¹⁵ Kathryn Grossman, *Les Misérables: Conversion, Revolution, & Redemption*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 64

of society that Victor Hugo sought to correct the most. Hugo said, in regards to his book, that “so long as the three problems of the century- the degradation of man by the exploitation of his labor, the ruin of woman by starvation, and the atrophy of childhood by physical and spiritual night- are not solved... in other words... so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, there should be a need for books such as this.”¹⁶ It is a testament to just how prevalent the idea of needing to “save the poor prostitute” that it made it into such a prized piece of literature, especially since Victor Hugo considered himself a champion of rights. However, as we later see, even his benevolence was limited by the pervasive misogyny found in society at the time.

Victor Hugo was, despite his social justice, was referred to as “Ego Hugo”. According to his acquaintances “his vanity was wondrous,”¹⁷ and he considered himself “a prophet, a mage” set in the centre of all things. He was apparently extremely sensual, possessing a lustful appetite that didn’t leave him until his final years, and “he sometimes compromised himself in rather ridiculous adventures.” This is best exemplified in his treatment of famous courtesan Alice Ozy, when he was “invited to see her *lit d’apparat*”¹⁸ and was not invited to bed with her, while his son was. He wrote his into his recollections, *Choses Vues*, describing “an intimate supper at which- he said- Alice Ozy had displayed her charms to him, and implied the grant of her favors, in the presence of her current lover.”⁷ This humiliated Alice, who saw through Hugo’s thinly disguised names in his writing, as he had accused her of “calculated cruelty to the only man she

¹⁶ Kathryn Grossman, *Les Miserables: Conversion, Revolution, & Redemption*, 13

¹⁷ Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1862), Introduction

¹⁸ William, Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 92-93

seems to have loved.”¹⁷ For a man who prided himself in his championing of the rights of the unfortunate, he certainly acted in a prideful manner in the case of this particular courtesan, simply because she had denied him sexual favors.

It is here that I begin my discussion of a different class of prostitutes: the courtesans, who were of the highest ranks of these women. Courtesans were in their own class as the grandest, most elite of the prostitutes. They possessed incredible amounts of wealth in diamonds, precious jewels, and properties in France. They dominated social talk, as, following the Franco-Prussian war, it was frowned upon to publish or discuss political matters so as not to ferment an insurrection.¹⁹ Therefore, media decided to focus on social matters, where the courtesans were shining in all their splendor. They were not subject to regulationism because, typically, they were connected to men that were so politically important that they could buy off any attempts to regulate their courtesans. While for lower-class prostitutes, brothel-keepers distributed advertisements “in the street, in hotels, or in railway station cards”²⁰ and had the women pose seductively to display the prospect of goods, courtesans already received the utmost attention and needed no advertisement to be known.

They influenced spectacular pieces of art and literature: Manet admits to have based his character of Nana, depicted in **Figure 5**, off of Blanche D’Antigny, one of the grandest courtesans. Nana and her story went on to be one of the most renowned pieces of art and literature to come from the era. They also commanded masses of men, often maintaining multiple lovers at once. They were especially known to set fashion trends during their glory days, as Cora Pearl did: “People who went to the Bois were determined

¹⁹ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*.

²⁰ Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute; Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, 125

to have a carriage modeled on hers, with little café-au-lait colored horses, as like as possible to the ones that she drove herself. It went without saying that the women of Paris, beginning with those at Court, copied her hair, her habits, and soon her fantastic behavior. “‘Since this enchantress has the art of drawing all men to her, of course,’ said Mme de P****, ‘we must do every mortal thing to be like her.’”²¹ One of the famous courtesans, Esther Guimond, was also described during the time as having “penetrated all social depths.”⁷ The commentator went on to say that “At age eighteen, this girl has already known the highest opulence, the lower misery, men at all levels. She holds a kind of magic curbed in men who, while involved in politics or science, literature or art, are still passionate at heart. There is no woman in Paris who can so effectively say to the Animal: “Out...” And the Animal [man] leaves its cage and wallows in excesses.”²²

Since literature and art were and continue to be a continuous reflection and simultaneous definition of the society in which they are based upon, the courtesans, which found their way into all sorts of works of art, were clearly both dominating the social cycles and in great demand during the 19th century. One could even go so far as to say that, as seen in the case of Esther Guimond, being a courtesan was one of the only ways to achieve social mobility in a time during which social constraints were so large of an issue that *Les Misérables* was almost based solely upon them.

However, despite their prowess, courtesans were still demonized because of their actions and “audacity”. Interestingly enough, as mentioned earlier, the courtesans represented perhaps one of the only ways for social mobility for women in 19th century

²¹ Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans; The Demi-Monde in 19th Century France* (London: Phoenix Press, 1967), 28

²² Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans; The Demi-Monde in 19th Century France*, 48

French society. Not many of the grand courtesans of the time were born into nobility- in fact, the majority of them were women of meager earnings who were deserted by their families, taken advantage of and left with no other option but to resort to prostitution, or those who had to support others (quite similar to the more common prostitutes). Perhaps the most famous courtesan of the time, Cora Pearl, came into the profession because she was raped as a young girl, and was damaged to the point where she did nothing but exact her revenge by using her body's power over men. In her memoirs, she says: "I can say that I have never had a favorite lover. That is explained by my own feelings, which have always inspired me with an instinctive horror of men. It is not that I am less sensitive than other women, or that thoughtfulness, kind attentions, and handsome behavior leave me indifferent. I have often sacrificed my own interest for the sake of gratitude or friendship. But as for what people call blind passions, or fatal infatuations, no! I have not known them, lucky for my peace and happiness. I have always considered the favorite lover as an empty form of speech, a hollow phrase."²³

Cora Pearl did not come from influential beginnings- she started off as the daughter of a music teacher, and continued on to become the most celebrated courtesan of her time. These women, despite their beginnings, came into contact with influential figureheads, usually through the theater or serendipitous means, and were elevated to the status where they could afford jewel encrusted bathtubs and houses all over the country. The clientele defined the prostitutes, not the other way around. In the records of the famous courtesans, there is little proof to show that the women actually enjoyed their sexual encounters, but, rather, benefitted from the enormous wealth that they could gather from their position. They were still, despite their exorbitant affluence, there for the

²³ Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans; The Demi-Monde in 19th Century France*, 26

purposes of male dominance, and often lost their jewels and properties as soon as they were no longer attractive enough to attract the attention of influential men.

Viel-Castle, a Frenchman of the Second Empire, recorded the following in his memoirs in 1857: “On top of the scum of Parisian society, there is a certain Madame de Paiva who is the queen of kept women, the sovereign of her race.”²⁴ This notion of the courtesans being “on top of the scum of Parisian society” is reflective of the common belief held. Although they were extremely influential and popular women, they were still, fundamentally, prostitutes, and members of a group of people who destroyed the notion of sexual activity being limited to the private sphere. Courtesans were even further vilified because they were so brazen about their sexual exploits. In fact, they were described as “streetwalkers... whose shamelessness ought to make them unworthy to appear on the registers of prostitution.”² This notion that the courtesans, who basked in luxury and wealth, were not appropriately shameful enough to be considered proper prostitutes reflects back on the previously discussed tendency of male authorities to feel uncomfortable with women who did not operate within their control, and to therefore belittle them. This, contrasted with the authorities in regards to male prostitutes is a fascinating juxtaposition, as pederasts- male prostitutes and men who engaged in same sex sexual relations, were perhaps the most openly persecuted group of prostitutes.

Pederasty was a term used by the police and officials, especially in the second half of the 19th century, to refer to male prostitutes and male homosexuals who engaged in sexual acts in public. At this point, I would also like to clarify that I use the terms ‘pederast’ and ‘pederasty’ for the sake of cultural context, and not as any sort of judgment on the individuals being described, as they may have been used at the time.

²⁴ Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans; The Demi-Monde in 19th Century France*, 52-53

In the case of the pederasts, it is important to note that during this time period the French Third Republic was experiencing a period of instability and uncertainty. Following the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war from 1870 to 1871 (during which Emperor Napoleon III was almost instantly captured), France was left in a state of instability due to the power vacuum that various political groups now felt obliged to fill. These groups consisted of the Orleanists, the Legitimists, the Bonapartists (who especially were put in a difficult position since the failure of Napoleon in his battle and were not being taken seriously) and the Republicans. These varying political parties eventually had to come up with a compromise that allowed them to work together. The civilians, unhappy with this government, attempted an insurrection in 1872, which, although unsuccessful, resulted in a paranoia that reflected on the civilian community with repercussions that lasted for years.²⁵ The government retaliated harshly and sought to maintain rigid rule for a vast majority of the late 19th century, having the police force weed out certain groups of people whom they believed disrupted order, presented especially immoral behavior, or who were essentially seen as deviant or problematic individuals.

The police were charged with the responsibility of detaining these social deviants so that they could not rally the masses against the government. Among these groups of deviants were the pederasts, or, males who sought out other males for sexual relations. None of the Napoleonic penal codes against rape, sexual assaults, public offenses against decency, incitement of youths to debauchery, adultery, and bigamy actually mentioned sodomy or pederasty as crimes. They did not include terms specifying same-sex

²⁵ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 1-3

relationships either, but they were used extensively against men who interacted sexually with other men multiple times, mostly if the acts occurred in public. They were not, however, used against women who engaged in same-sex relations nearly as much.

Perhaps a main reason that pederasty was treated so harshly after the Franco-Prussian war was because of the declining birthrate and high infant mortality rates in France at the time, and the defeat at the hands of Germany in 1870.²⁶ The anxiety following those events would lead to the natural inclination of wanting both more masculine figures to be able to defend the country, and people who did not shirk back on their nationalist responsibility to conceive children. In engaging in homosexuality, and in public, it was perceived that these men were actively removing themselves from the gene pool and their parenting responsibilities, all the while doing it in a public display that could corrupt the impressionable youth into doing the same. The focus on male corruption of the youth could also be attributed to the separation of the public versus private sphere. Public life entailed the work sphere and politics, which were generally dominated by men, whereas the private domestic sphere consisted of women. When youth were corrupted, the future generations of the public sphere were being spoiled, disruption the spheres for ages to come with this blatant immoral sexuality. Sexuality was generally restricted to the private sphere, which is why public manifestations of it were so much frowned upon.

The clientele for prostitutes were almost exclusively male, which speaks to the patriarchal society during the time period, and allows for better understanding of why male prostitutes were almost always associated with homosexuality. France, at the time,

²⁶ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 58

was still steeped in the western-Christian belief that same-sex relations were a sin, and that with proper conditioning their sins could be atoned for. However, in the enforcement of strict regulations that the police were tasked with, a whole new connotation was made of same-sex sexuality as a crime. It began with the police gradually coming to terms with the concept that they could not change the behavior of the pederasts, and could instead view them as the social deviants rather than sinners who could not be saved. This caused a social shift in the view of same sex relations, as they became understood as a social offense rather than sacrilegious. They were perceived more as something that went against the natural social order and ought to be confined in order to maintain society's moral code. With the introduction of medical opinions into the mix, the associations of crime and illness began to form during this time, following a trend that had begun in the eighteenth century.

In doing so, a societal stigma was established, with medical practitioners casting aspersions that weren't necessarily true but forced male prostitutes to submit to examinations anyways. For example, a doctor believed that masturbation caused fevers, headaches, skin diseases, intestinal disorders, and other physical disabilities. There was medical belief that "the dimensions of the penis of the individuals who engage actively in sodomy are either very thin or very voluminous... [and] excessive in one sense of another."²⁷ These doctors also believed in clear effeminate exterior signs that a sodomite could be recognized by. They considered features such as "curled hair, made-up skin, open collar, waist tucked in to high-light the figure, fingers, ears, chest loaded with jewelry; the whole body exuding an odor of the most penetrating perfumes; and in the

²⁷ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 54

hand, a handkerchief, flowers, or some needlework... [to be] the strange, revolting, and rightfully suspect physiognomy that betrays the pederast.”²⁸ These types of physical attributes were supposedly examples of the “moral perversions” of these men, who took on womanly attributes and disrupted the social order. These professional, medical opinions were reflected onto society who took them to heart and believed that pederasts were capable of terrible acts of violence and manipulations. Since they were used to skewing the order of things, it seemed a natural leap to crimes, and with the addition of medical prejudice against them, male prostitutes were targeted as those who were not only a health risk, but also a risk to the social order. Though the male prostitutes had to submit to examinations as well, the tests were not, as in the case of the females, designed specifically to protect male clientele, but were instead for maintaining social order. Following the Franco-Prussian war, maintaining social order was a very important aspect of political discourse, and rigid discipline was maintained to the extreme, as is exemplified in the 1,118 males who were arrested and recorded in the ledger of such public offenders on either activities or just basic suspicion of male prostitution.²⁹ **Figure 6** displays a chart of the causes for arrest during the second half of the 19th century. Upon examination, it is clear that the majority of the causes are due to public indecency and disruption, proving just how important social order was.

Male prostitutes were, for the most part, equated with thieves. It was believed that “they stole from their employers, if they were lucky enough to have a legitimate occupation; from their clients, either directly through the use of threats or violence or

²⁸ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 54

²⁹ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 35

indirectly through their surreptitious thefts or fraudulent schemes; and from one another, since even their own relationships... were not based on trust or honesty.”⁶ They were considered to be heinous individuals who, if capable of breaking the social norm of sexual relationships, could be capable of anything. The clients and prostitutes were shamed alike, with their relationship being defined as that of two “somasochists, since the prostitutes were willing to commit violence and even murder in order to achieve their criminal goals, while the clients were willing to submit to these crimes because they were ashamed of their own sexual habits.”⁶ This belief that the clients, too, were unethical because they decidedly used the prostitutes as sexual objects is ironic to say the least, considering that was precisely what the female prostitution industry was encouraged for.

Even within the circle of male prostitution, class distinctions were easily made. Places such as bathhouses and cafes were places frequented by pederast and others seeking sexual activities. “The lower classes frequented the bathhouses open to all, while the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy went to exclusive ones.”³⁰ Since those of the lower class banded together in a sort of sexual underground apart from the elites, they were arrested together, frequently in places such as the bathhouses. However, when “an aristocrat or a bourgeois man was also arrested...he was almost inevitably caught with a member of the working class.”³¹ For the members of the elite class, the sexual subculture was more of a novelty or thrill that was meant to be explored, as opposed to a community, as lower class men were accustomed to thinking of it. However, “for the elites, sexual relations with members of their own classes were frequently the source of

³⁰ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 169

³¹ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 147

shame or embarrassment, because they were unable to maintain a feeling of distance or superiority.”³² In order to rid themselves of this shame, they preferred to associate and sexually liberate themselves with men from different, typically lower, social classes, using them as objects, “usually casually and anonymously, and frequently they paid a fee.”³³ They were also selective in their prostitutes, opting to typically choose soldiers, who were perhaps the most masculine of the inmates, and were attracting guardsman to the upper-class men who would not feel so ashamed about their actions. The upper class pederasts were also accustomed to legal ties and political connections that would allow them to get off of charges unencumbered, and personal doctors who would allow more time for psychological examinations rather than physical ones.

In regards to public regulation and legal discrimination, the pederasts were at the forefront of suspicion and strict regulation. However, male prostitutes did not have to go through nearly as much de facto discrimination as females did, as the position was not even officially recognized. Police didn’t bother to distinguish between male prostitutes and clients, referring to both as pederasts. It is difficult to ascertain concrete evidence of male prostitution cases within this time period because both prostitutes and men looking for sexual pleasure were treated in the same way so long as they were disrupting the public sphere. While women were prone to having their rights violated upon basic accusations of prostitution, men were charged with a misdemeanor and sent on to the courts for the most part. While police were entirely comfortable with violating the rights of working class women who were not even necessarily prostitutes, authority figures

³² William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 147

³³ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 148

were careful to “serve the legal protections of working-class men.”³⁴ Even within the detaining of male prostitutes, who were considered disgusting deviants, special care was given to ensuring certain liberties were protected.

The difference between male and female prostitution was based on the underlying misogynistic notion that female prostitution was the necessary evil that provided an “outlet for male sexual behavior.”² With men, prostitution did not exist beyond the purpose of encouraging the “unnatural” desires of pederasts, which is why, within the public sphere male prostitutes were often legally persecuted in order to set an example for others. Even the sheer persecution of the pederasts attests to the idea that gender rules over class in regards to prostitution, as they were considered the more serious threats. The worth of the prostitute was defined by who they could be submissive to, and this persecution of male prostitutes is a reflection of the idea that males did not, and should not be submissive to anyone, which is why the idea of them as prostitutes was depicted as perversion. Ultimately, despite class differences, which, as I have proved, played a definitive role within reactions towards and treatment of these individuals, gender acts as the overarching defining factor in the two. This reflects the sexist social dynamics that are not only restricted to the common-folk, but are within the sexual subculture as well. As individuals who blatantly defied the unspoken notion that sexual activity should be limited to the public sphere, the treatment of these individuals, the supposed “inferiors,” reflects the pervasive classism and sexism found in society as a whole, as it is most telling to look at the factors that define those that are classified as “lesser” individuals

³⁴ William Penniston, *Pederasts and Others; Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, 158

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Appendix



Figure 1
Toulouse-Lautrec, "Rue des Moulins" (1894)

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Figure 2

Edgar Degas, "The Client" (1878-1880)

In Figures of Ill Repute; Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France.
Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989.

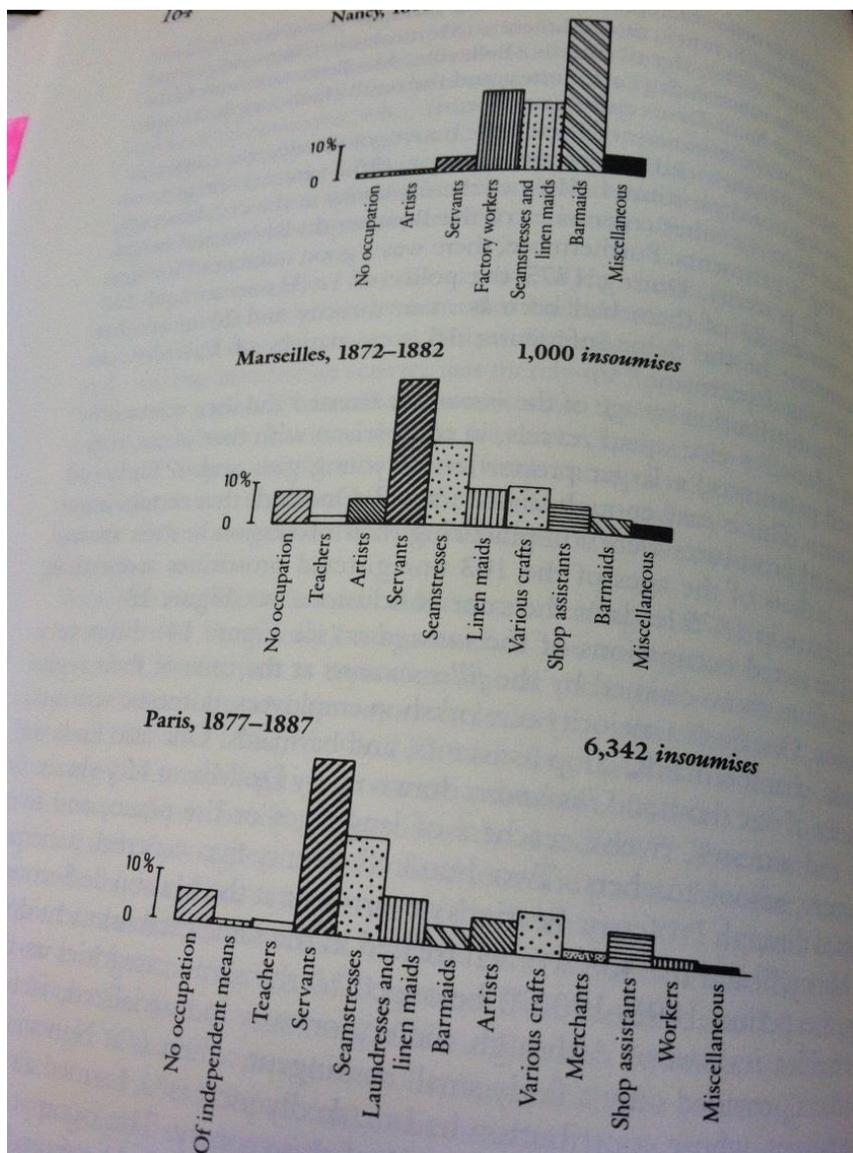


Figure 3

Corbin, Alain. "From Confinement to Surveillance: The Failure of Regulationism." In *Women for Hire*, translated by Alan Sheridan, 164. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990

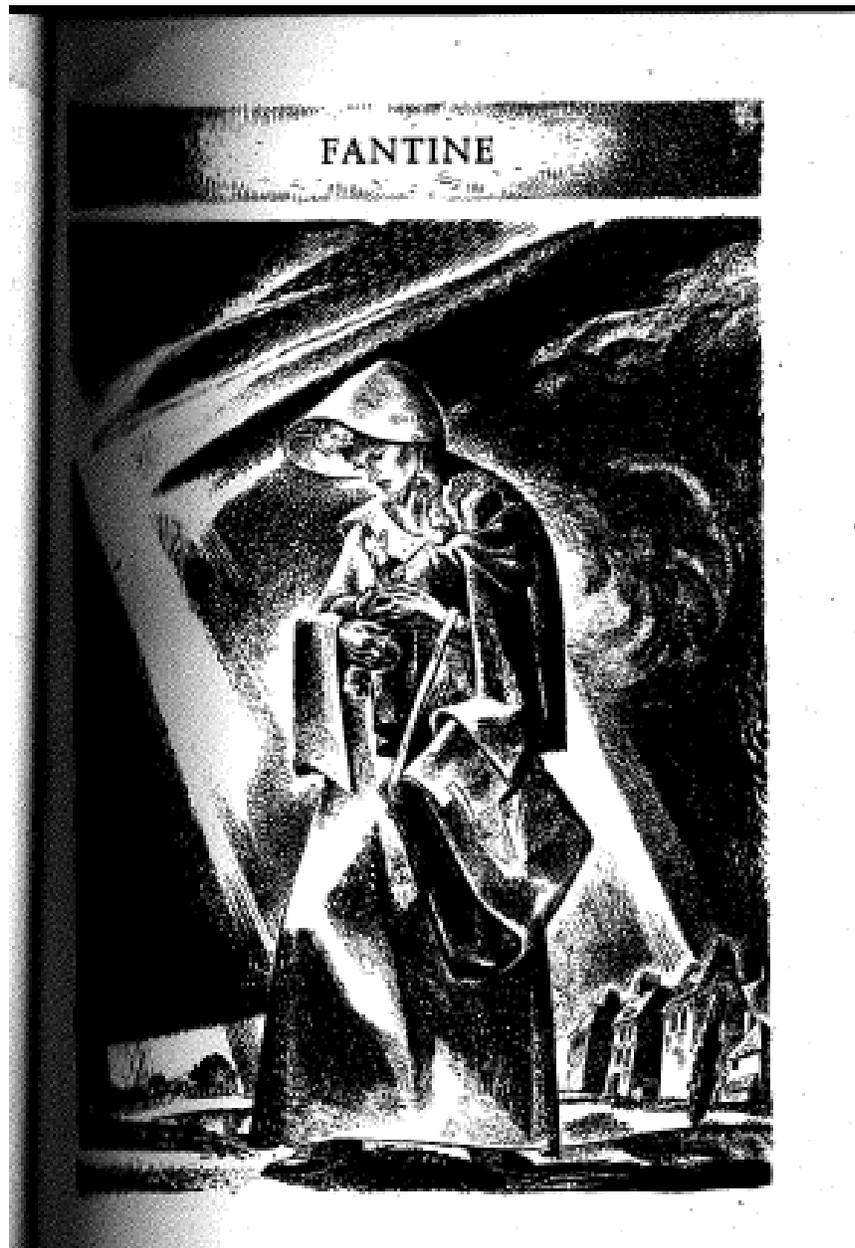


Figure 4
Lynd Ward, "Fantine" (1935)

In *Les Miserables*. New York: The Heritage Press, 1862.



Figure 5
Edouard Manet, "Nana" (1877)

Wikimedia commons

Table 3.1. Crimes 37

Type of Crime	Number
Blackmail	9
Duel	1
Falsification of certificate	1
Incitement to debauchery	5
Murder	1
Mysterious death	1
Pederasty	52
Public offense against decency	293
Resistance	20
Rupture of ban	3
Sexual assault	1
Theft	15
Vagrancy	16

Note: Based on 346 cases. In some cases, more than one crime was listed.

Figure 6
 Peniston, William A. "The Police in the 1870's", Table 3.1 "Crimes" In *Pederasts and Others*, 37. Binghamton, Harrington Park Press, 2004