

The Prostitution of Praise

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You must study a particular way of commending every thing he wears, the fitting of his shoes, the mixture of his Stockings, the shape of his Leg, his Tread, the turn up of his Breeches... (Anonymous 158).

So insists Madam Creswel in an obscure text, *The Whores Rhetorick [sic] Calculated to the Meridian of London; And Conformed to the Rules of Art: In Two Dialogues*, published anonymously in 1683¹ with an “Epistle Dedicatory” by Philo-Puttanus (a Latin pseudonym meaning “lover of whores”). Structured as two dialogues between procuress Madam Creswel and her virginal protégé Dorothea, the text highlights the advantages of prostitution and teaches various seductive manoeuvres, employing (and parodying) rhetorical techniques so as to elevate what the author, in the introductory “Epistle to the Reader,” calls “the bawdy Science” (n.p.) as high as possible. Lest one miss the satire, the author notes that his motives are two-fold: “Remember if the Whores are hence taught to exercise their talents with some dexterity; you are the same time instructed to detect and avoid the cheat” (“Epistle to the Reader” n.p.). In other words, the text is designed to be both instructional and demystifying, overtly advising what to do and covertly advising the opposite. Furthermore, although the subject matter appears to be primarily the sex trade, it may also be rhetoric itself. As editors James R. Irvine and G. Jack Gravlee point out in their introduction to a 1979 facsimile edition,

Perhaps the art of rhetoric as practiced by orators of the day was actually the subject of the dialogues. The imitation of orators is said to be a useful practice for whores. Why not turn things around? Contemporary priests, lawyers, and legislators surface in the dialogues as less-than-commendable figures. Perhaps the religious, legal, or political orator of the day, practicing deception as he did, might follow the example of London whores, whom he no doubt had ample opportunity to observe in action. By such an interpretation this work would appear to be a study of rhetoric as practiced in Restoration England. (xii)²

I argue that the type of rhetoric that is most problematized through *The Whores Rhetorick* is the epideictic rhetoric of praise. Since so much of the text involves praise of prostitution, recruitment through praise, and methods of praising clients, the text figuratively prostitutes praise itself.

The Whores Rhetorick is a loose translation and adaptation of a 1642 Italian work,

¹ This text was first printed anonymously in 1683 by George Shell, London; reprinted by Thomas George Stevenson, Edinburgh in 1863 with a dust cover attributing authorship to Ferrante Pallavacino, twelve engravings of “celebrated London courtezans,” and an anonymous introduction later discovered to be by James Maidment (Stevenson 12); reprinted by Ivan Obolenski Inc., New York in 1961, based on one of only two surviving copies of the 1683 edition; and reprinted by Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints in 1979 based on the 1683 edition, with an introduction by James R. Irvine and G. Jack Gravlee.

² Irvine and Gravlee note that the English text retains the neo-Ciceronian emphasis on all five parts of rhetoric— invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery—although the bulk of the discussion concerns style (xi).

Ferrante Pallavicino's *La Rettorica delle Puttane, Composta Conformi li Precetti di Cipriano*. A Scottish 1863 reprint attributes the 1683 English text to Pallavicino, pointing out that the dedication is "almost a literal translation" of the Italian, while the other introductory material is "an enlarged alteration" (i). The frame story of an old procuress teaching a virgin is essentially the same, as are the lessons in prostitution, which parody lessons in Italian Cyprian Soarez' *The Art of Rhetoric* (1568),³ a core instructional text used in Jesuit colleges in the seventeenth century (Muir 93). Nevertheless, the English text no longer numbers or separates the lessons, reshaping them as interactive dialogues, after the model of Lucian of Samosata's second century *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, and naming the old woman Madam Creswel, after a renowned procuress living near London at the time the English version of Pallavacino's text was published (ii-iii). Unlike Lucian's dialogues, which show an older whore giving straightforward and, at times, rather blunt seductive advice to a younger woman, *The Whores Rhetorick* is almost novelistic in its narrative and dialogue development, including personable characters, collegial expressions, and examples from everyday life. As the 1836 introduction points out, the English translator has creatively enhanced the text, "infus[ing] a spirit into the work, which the reader will in vain search for in the original" (ii).⁴ Moreover, while the Italian text continues past the lessons to depict graphically the virgin's success in carrying out the old woman's instructions, the English text simply ends with the virgin's promise to do her best to heed the advice. Although Pallavacino is the original inventor of the prostitutional rhetoric, the English text deserves attention on its own, especially in so far as it heartily appears to endorse the material it presents.

Before looking at *The Whores Rhetorick*, it is worth noting that seventeenth century British praise had become an elaborate performative display, in keeping with Italian rhetorician Cyprian Soarez' 1568 claim that "the proper function of praise is to amplify and adorn" (142) and in defiance of French Humanist Peter Ramus' 1543 attacks on rhetoric as hollow ornamentation and stylistic excess.⁵ British evocations of praise were similar to the performances of "poets in theatres," whose epideictic skills were derided as prostitutional by Stephen Gosson in 1579: "They arrange comforts of melody, to tickle the ear; costly apparel, to flatter the sight; effeminate gesture, to ravish the sense; and wonton speech, to whet desire to inordinate lust" (qtd. in Lenz 833). Even in other locations of rhetoric—the pulpit, the court, or the podium at public festivals—the stylistic excesses embellishing rhetoric threatened to belie false pretenses, hiding profit-making agendas and hollow values. The scene of praise appeared to be consistently prostitutional, creating a spectacle of pleasure for the purpose of manipulation and eventual profit. Within such a context, *The Whores Rhetorick* nevertheless presented a creative revision of the endeavours and complexities that praise enables and supports.

³ The Italian version is Cipriano Suarez's *De Arte Rhetorica*. Soarez' rhetoric is based on rules of rhetoric compiled from Cicero, Quintilian, and, to a lesser degree, Aristotle, Horace, and Virgil.

⁴ The "Introductory Notice" to this edition provides evidence that the English adaptor might be Mr. Thomas Brown, author of "Letters from the Dead to the Living" (1702) from which he quotes several passages about prostitution. Brown's authorship of "Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London" (1700) certainly sounds similar to the subtitle of *The Whores Rhetorick*. But Maidment cautions that "this is mere supposition" and points instead to "Sir Robert L'Estrange, who had much coarse humour," especially in his translation of one of Quevarado's texts (viii).

⁵ In opposition to the Neo-Ciceronian emphasis upon five parts of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery), Ramus declared the elements of invention and arrangement (and to a lesser extent memory) to be part of logic or dialectic, leaving stylistic ornamentation (and, for oral presentations, dramatic delivery) to rhetoric.

The most obvious praise in *The Whores Rhetorick* occurs in the dedication, which enthusiastically promotes “the most famous University of London Courtezans” to whom the book is dedicated. It is, of course, not difficult to praise prostitution to prostitutes⁶, but the author, who signs the “Epistle Dedicatory” as Philo-Puttanus, seems particularly skilled in commending the virtuous greatness of the courtesans as “exquisite artists in [their] Profession” (A2r). He claims that these women are so magnificent that he can spare himself “the trouble of acting the Sycophant in a long and nauseous Epistle” (A3v), wryly noting that their “Vertues are conspicuous to all Eyes, and palpable by all hands too: [their] perfections are the common Theme of the people and [their] graces are daily exposed to publick view” (A3v-A4r). That he is exaggerating the magnificence may be inferred by his use of the words “nauseous,” “conspicuous,” “palpable,” and “exposed,” which carry with them associations of distaste and unwelcome publicity for respectable women.⁷ Still, beyond the wary hyperbole, the author elaborates in a manner that reinterprets their promiscuous behavior as inherently moral, providing support for his suggestion that they are virtuous, thus deserving of praise. In doing so, he employs Cyprian Soarez’s “rules for embellishment” (142) articulating qualities of soul and conduct that are particularly praiseworthy.

Whereas Soarez highlights Jesuit virtues of prudence, wisdom, scientific knowledge, justice, fortitude, temperance, and modesty (143),⁸ the author of *The Whores Rhetoric* specifies another set of commendable qualities: Christian humility (in serving even the lowest of men), affability (in serving willingly), hospitality (in welcoming all men), and charity (in giving profusely) (A4r), which are similar to ancient Aristotelian qualities of magnanimity and liberality⁹. Among this list Philo-Puttanus paradoxically includes chastity, arguing that prostitutes no longer operate out of “lust and carnal affections” since the industry has rendered them “as insensible of sensitive pleasure, as if [they] were made of Wood or Stone” (A4-A4v). One cannot help but admire the author’s rhetorical skill in praising whores as saints simply by reinterpreting signs of bodily fatigue as virtuous denials of fleshly desire.¹⁰ Moreover, the author suggests that their valour in this respect far exceeds that of “the severest Moralist, or the most Holy of Primitive Fathers, who never could subjugate their Bodies to that degree” (A4v). By associating whores with moralists and holy fathers, the author not only elevates the whores but

⁶ Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* mentions that Socrates used to say “it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens” (1.9:30; 1367b; K 79). When discussing epideictic introductions, Aristotle repeats Socrates’ statement while recommending that the orator should make the “hearer think he shares the praise, either himself or his family or his way of life or at least something of the sort” (3.14:11; 1415b; K 235).

⁷ Alison Conway in *The Protestant Whore: Courtesan Narrative and Religious Controversy in England, 1680-1750* notes that “many satiric works of the period characterized all the court women as whores” (21), especially since the mistresses of the king were openly honoured as “court subjects” (12). Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church, to which the King’s brother adhered, was often represented as the Whore of Babylon by Protestant courtiers, expressing both seductive and deceitful qualities (13).

⁸ In addition to Quintilian and Cicero, Soarez’s *Art of Rhetoric* relies upon Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, which particularly mentions exemplary virtues of “justice, manly courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, gentleness, prudence, and wisdom” (Aristotle 1.9:5; 1366b; K 76).

⁹ Hobbes’ *Brief of the Art of Rhetoric: Containing in Substance all that Aristotle hath Written in His Three Books on that Subject* in 1681 lists justice, fortitude, temperance, liberality, magnanimity, magnificence, and prudence. But Hobbes particularly defines liberality as “a Vertue, by which we benefit others in matter [sic] of money” (1.9; n.p.), which would preclude prostitutional benefits, which require payment by money.

¹⁰ This reinterpretation, of course, is in line with Aristotle’s recommendation that “one should always take each of the attendant terms in the best sense; ... [calling] for example, the rash one as ‘courageous,’ the spendthrift as ‘liberal’” (1.9:29; 1367b; K 79).

also debases the religious men with whom they are contrasted.

Praising practitioners of the sex trade as being “stored with all the moral Vertues and not deficient in one Theological Grace [except for faith in the credit of a customer who is unable to pay before being served]” (A4v-5r), the author of *The Whores Rhetorick* could be said to satirize the Greek Aristotelian notion that praise manifests or “makes clear the great virtue [of the subject praised]” (Aristotle I.9.33; 1367b; K 80), virtue itself being “an ability. . . that is productive and preservative of goods, and an ability for doing good in many and great ways in all things” (I.9:4;1366a; K 76). In its very promotion of virtue, praise already participates in the Latin etymological base of the word “prostitute”: “from *pro-* before + *statuere* to cause to stand, set up, place” (“Prostitute” Etymology). Praise places virtue before an audience, elevating and amplifying it for all to admire, like a slave before a potential owner, or like a speaker before an audience.¹¹ Likewise, Philo-Puttanus stations the virtue of the London courtesans prominently in his dedication, insisting that they produce much good in attending to the sexual needs of their clients. His praise makes their virtue fully visible, promoting what might remain unnoticed or taken for granted without the assistance of epideictic language to identify and promote its presence. At the same time, of course, he cannot deny the usual meaning of prostitution: “the offering of the body to indiscriminate lewdness for hire (especially as a practice or institution); whoredom, harlotry” (“Prostitution” Def. n.1), hinting, in fact, that his praises ought to enable him to receive free sexual favours, “without the necessity of coming with a golden ticket” (A5v). Praise plays a crucial role in drawing attention to the prostitute’s sexualized features, reducing her only to those virtues that have market value. (Indeed, one might say that any praise is reductive in this way, prostituting the “virtues” but ignoring the rest of the individual). Although *The Whores Rhetorick* also highlights the freedom and rewards of the harlot’s situation, the text nevertheless explicitly satirizes the manifestation of virtue, ridiculing its purity by applying it to sexualized commodities.

Such cheeky exaltation of prostitutional virtues is quite typical of British satire during the reign of Charles II (1660-1685), replacing Puritan religious devotion with playful sexual innuendos and clever wit. Clever praises were seen as the essence of rhetorical finesse. According to literary critic James Graham Turner in “*The Whores Rhetorick: Narrative, Pornography, and the Origins of the Novel*,” “rhetoric enjoyed the highest artistic status, and yet its persuasive goal made it unashamedly ‘promotional,’ instrumental, and stimulative—precisely the criteria that are now used to distinguish art from pornography” (301). Turner does not mention epideictic rhetoric per se, but he does suggest that “the prestigious arts of persuasion were quite compatible with the scandalous arts of sexual arousal” (301), using a variety of stylistic devices to entertain the reader. It is interesting, therefore, that Pallavacino’s text, which was originally designed to mock rhetoric, was read in England as an arousing promotion of erotic arts. As feminist critic Bridget Orr explains, “In Italian [*The Whores Rhetorick*] functioned as a satire on rhetoric, on the Jesuits and on religion but in its much adapted English form, despite its lack of bawdy or obscene material, it was regarded and consumed as an erotic text and prosecuted as such in 1683” (202).¹² No wonder that a disclaimer was included in the

¹¹A woodcut entitled “The Allegory of Lady Rhetoric” in the medieval encyclopedia *Margarita Philosophica* (1504) shows Lady Rhetoric thus prostituted, honourably stationed upon a throne on an elevated platform, decorated by rhetorical terms, with a lily and a sword in her mouth, surrounded by a variety of ancient rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Seneca, and Cicero who look at her with benevolent, lascivious, or distrustful eyes (Clark, frontispiece). Only Lady Rhetoric’s virtues are promoted, while she herself is a passive woman, unable to speak.

¹²Orr notes that *The Whores Rhetorick* and several other erotic texts “circulated widely among affluent and literate

“Introductory Notice” given in the 1836 Scottish edition, explaining that the text is not designed to “inflame the passions, but, on the contrary, to check them, by laying bare the system of deceit practiced by those miserable creatures whose hypocritical endearments lead the unwary to destruction” (Maidment xx). Such a disclaimer is perhaps necessary not only for erotic satires but for all witty rhetorical texts that seem to endorse the deceit they seek to disclose.

A similar disclaimer for praise appears in “The Epistle to the Reader” after the “Epistle Dedicatory” in the 1683 text of *The Whores Rhetorick*, excusing any positive representation of prostitution in the book on three grounds. First, the author suggests that the imagination of “Courteous Reader” assists in enabling the “Value and Lustre” of both women and books to be manifest (n.p.), thus bearing some responsibility for the praise that ensues. Second, although the author implies that he himself is unlikely to please readers who desire a more “scurrilous and obscene dish” (n.p.), he notes that a writer’s need to satisfy all readers is no less prostitutional than a whore’s need to “gratify all mankind” (n.p.), thus employing a secondary figurative meaning of “prostitute”: “debased ... devoted to infamous gain” (“Prostitute” Def. fig.adj.2), like an artist who uses his/her talents only for publicity, fame, and wealth, rather than for artistic excellence.¹³ Suggesting that the author’s own talents are thus prostituted, “The Epistle to the Reader” argues that “an Author may reap the Fruit of singular merit, may deserve an universal applause, by handling the most trivial, the most inconsiderable subject” (n.p), admitting in the process that no matter how wonderful the subject matter may appear to be in the book that follows, it remains inherently “trivial” and “inconsiderable.” Finally, the author claims that his exposition and even magnification of prostitutional rhetoric can assist a reader in identifying whores as “Monsters, who can destroy miserable man with a single embrace” (n.p.). He carefully notes that “if this Rhetorick has elevated the bawdy Science above its ordinary Sphere,” the elevation is part of the satire, helping to alert the reader of the whore’s “dexterity” rather than to encourage admiration or emulation. Praise, in other words, is to be excused as part of the satire, regardless of how convincing it may appear.

Beyond the disclaimers, *The Whores Rhetorick* nevertheless employs praise quite freely in the introductory narrative to attract a recruit to the prostitutional trade. Here the demonstrative function of praise, which is designed to be “heard only,” according to Thomas Hobbes’ seventeenth century interpretation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, is augmented by a deliberative function, inducing judgment and action beyond the present (I.3; n.p.). The narrative begins with the praise of a “young and most beautiful Virgin” (1), Dorothea, who has recently relocated from the country to the city, lacking family, connections, and financial security. When Dorothea is reduced to weeping self-pity for her poverty and isolation, she is visited by Madam Creswel, an old, ugly, and somewhat sickly procuress, who raises her spirits with compliments and kind assistance:

The Character I had of your beauty (fair creature), of the endowments of your mind, and withal, the ill circumstances of your present condition, have brought me this way, and into this place: I am come to lay before you the unhappiness of the state you live in; what you must expect if you persist therein; am willing to shew you the

Englishmen” (202). Moreover, although the book was censored in 1683, it “reappeared the following year in the Term Catalogue and was not again censored” (202).

¹³Using the word “prostitute” in this way, George Campbell in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) particularly cautions rhetoricians to avoid the “barefaced prostitution of talents ... in supporting indifferently, as pecuniary considerations determine him, truth or falsehood, justice or injustice” (119).

fittest remedies for your distemper, am ready to afford you my best advice; and if you be not wanting to your self, to put an end to all your misery and trouble” (13).

Even before proposing that Dorothea should work in Madam Creswel’s brothel, the old woman prostitutes Dorothea by subjecting her to the brothel’s vision, making the young woman blush by drawing attention to her physical beauty, a necessary virtue in the business of procuring male clients. Moreover, she manufactures Dorothea’s consent by extending her praise beyond physical features to mental “endowments”¹⁴, thus appearing to respect her rational decision-making abilities. Finally, the old woman offers to help Dorothea overcome her “ill circumstances” by showing her how to become financially independent through the use of her body, managing successfully to procure Dorothea as a fresh prostitute who will be beholden to her for rhetorical advice and shelter. Praise thus not only manifests the greatness of Dorothea’s feminine virtues, but also assists in her reconstruction as a prostitudinal subject.

Dorothea’s “satisfaction” in being addressed with such flattering kindness (13) reveals the effectiveness of a “direct opening,” as described in a popular rhetorical text in the Renaissance, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* (c.90 BC), believed at the time to be written by Cicero. The direct opening (as opposed to a subtle opening) is designed to “enable us to have hearers who are attentive, receptive, and well-disposed” (I.iv.6) and involves a variety of methods depending on the likelihood of the audience’s reception. If the reception is “doubtful,” as in the case of Dorothea, the emphasis needs to be upon fostering “goodwill, so that the discreditable part of the cause cannot be prejudicial to us” (*Rhetorica* I.iv.6). It is interesting that much of this garnering of goodwill relies upon praise: “From the discussion of the person of our hearers goodwill is secured if we set forth the courage, wisdom, humanity, and nobility of past judgements they have rendered, and if we reveal what esteem they enjoy and with what interest their decision is awaited” (I.v.8). Following such rhetorical prescription, Madam Creswel suggests that Dorothea is wise, beautiful, and well-esteemed, arguing that it would be wrong for a “Mistress of large possessions of Wit and Beauty [to] hide those precious talents” (15). In response, Dorothea expresses full compliance to the old woman’s rhetoric: “if you have already discovered any thing [sic] in my person your goodness calls a valuable treasure ... you should presuppose in me such a willingness to comply with your kind proposals” (15). What Dorothea does not realize is that her own docile goodwill is also a mark of servility, subordinating herself as a receptive recruit to prostitudinal culture.¹⁵

Besides praising Dorothea directly, Madam Creswel praises the values intrinsic to prostitution, as if the author of *The Whores Rhetorick* is aware of the strong ideological role that epideictic rhetoric has in promoting cultural values. As classical rhetorical scholar George A. Kennedy notes, praise (and its counterpart blame) serves “to encourage belief, group solidarity, and acceptance of a system of values” (*Art* 61-62). Although speaking to only one potential

¹⁴Several recent psychological researchers have observed that praise needs to be specific and “explicitly emphasise strategy, effort, or other dimensions that are under children’s control” (Corpus and Lepper 506) in order to induce positive results. Ruth Davidhizar and Stephen Down indicate that praise of someone’s appearance is the least useful for inducing cooperation since it can be perceived as “trite and condescending,” while compliments that are ability-related or behaviour-oriented are much more apt to achieve cooperative results (480). When praise is directed too generically, for personality traits rather than for particular actions, it can lead to complacency rather than motivate attentive effort or persistence (Zentall and Morris 155).

¹⁵In the twentieth century, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche provides an aphorism that could be applicable to Dorothea’s situation: “So long as you are praised, think only that you are not yet on your own path but on that of another” (1879: aph. 340).

recruit, Madam Creswel ensures that her praise reaches beyond individual aggrandizement, distinguishing and clarifying the virtues that the community of whores values most fully.

She told her that liberty was the first and the greatest benefit of nature; that the old World had not been circumscribed by any of those political Laws, which the craft of Priests and cunning of States had introduced to abridge the World of that satisfaction which variety of love affords mankind.

Emphasizing liberty and variety in love, Madam Creswel helps confirm and promote libertine values of the Restoration court, which were opposed to the decorum advised by the church or the legal system.¹⁶ In the process, the author wins approval from his ideal audience in 1683, which is composed of libertines and mistresses who are eager to hear the praises of promiscuous “virtues.” As twentieth century rhetorical scholar Cynthia Sheard notes, the more a particular virtue is praised, the more it is confirmed and promoted, enabling that virtue to continue strengthening the community (766).

While the values of liberty and variety in love might appeal to any seventeenth century libertine, Madam Creswel also praises specific values pertaining to the prostitutes themselves, highlighting the potential rewards for those participating in her trade:

She magnified the pleasure, state, and pomp enjoyed by Whores, the unspeakable felicity there was in a multitude of Lovers and Idolators: that she was to expect deluges of gold and all other good things the World affords, if she would carefully observe those Rules she would lay before her” (15-16).

The narrator’s use of the word “magnified” makes the reader aware of the exaggeration involved in the praise, but otherwise the description sounds quite ideal, at least to a gold-lover, which is what the prostitute must become. Still, the mention of gold diminishes the situation from a seventeenth century rhetorical perspective. In Thomas Hobbes’ 1681 *Brief of the Art of Rhetoric. Containing in Substance all that Aristotle hath written in his three books on that subject*, Hobbes carefully removes financial considerations from the realm of goodness, noting that praiseworthy virtue involves honorable action, “the reward whereof is rather Honour than Money” (I.9.n.p). For liberty and variety in love to be truly praiseworthy in the seventeenth century, they cannot be associated with commerce, the requisite payment for services rendered being one of the strongest detriments to prostitution that the author of *The Whores Rhetorick* can imagine. Still Madam Creswel is not arguing for prostitutional honour so much as attempting to attract Dorothea to the cause, successfully appealing to her interests as an isolated and impoverished young woman.

To enhance the recruitment, Madam Creswel extols her own past performance as a whore in order to help Dorothea identify with the glorious prospects of the profession. But she also warns of the pitfalls that can ruin such prospects. In her personal story, Madam Creswel indicates that due to her own “study of polite Learning,” she “soon arrived at a remarkable perfection in [her] own Trade, and in a little while was valued as one of the first rate Whores” (19). She achieved various splendid rewards of the profession until she made a grave error that she cautions Dorothea to avoid. Exploring “the wild and impassible mazes of Philosophy” rather than adhering to the rules of rhetoric, she fell in love “with a dissolute and faithless fellow” (20) who led her in search of philosophical truths that exhausted her income. Dorothea sympathizes

¹⁶ Bridget Orr notes that these libertine values are expressly masculine, sexualizing women while keeping them from participation in the political realm (207).

with her plight and then adds that she will “gladly build on the experience you have so dearly purchased, and rest satisfied with such Doctrines as you shall be pleased to impart unto me” (22).

Madam Creswel likewise praises other exemplary women in the profession, describing at one point the “extraordinary charms” of a former whore, Katherine, who hoodwinked a young man to marry her and then continued to send “ingenious quaint Love-Letters” to her husband to keep him in her amorous power. Madam Creswel urges Dorothea to follow such model behaviour: “Pray Heaven, Child, thou mayest have virtue to follow the wise Katherines [sic] sage and unerring foot-steps” (107). Through praise of other prostitutes, Madam Creswel molds Dorothea’s identity, enabling her to conform to the prostitudinal ideology and earn similar praises herself. It is not long before Dorothea herself admires model behaviour: “I approve mightily of neatness in a Whore, as well as a luxurious magnificence, because in these you make her agree with a Lady of quality and reputation” (110). She fully endorses the image she has been led to emulate. As Sheard points out in discussing “The Public Value of Epideictic Rhetoric,” those who have observed others being praised, not only seek to imitate their virtues, but also internalize awareness that these heroic attributes are praiseworthy, thus ensuring that commonly held values of the status quo are respected and maintained (776-79). We see then, that Madam Creswel’s praise is compelling, not only setting praised subjects on display as cultural models for Dorothea to follow, but also encouraging her to simulate the valued “good” of the prostitudinal culture.

From an educational perspective, Madam Creswel’s praise could be seen as admirably structured to motivate her student most fully. The Roman rhetorician and educator Quintilian suggests in the *Institutio Oratorio* (c.95 AD) that different students respond differently to praise or blame, since some require more prodding, control, or censure than others. But for a gifted mind, “praise gives it growth and effort increase, and the thought that it is doing something great fills it with joy” (I.ii:30; B 53). Such is the case with Dorothea, who seems to blossom under the praise and modeling that her instructor provides. Madam Creswel is so pleased with her student’s aptitude that she “applaud[s]” Dorothea for being “a disciple after my own Heart, to whom I may, before I leave this World, leave all the choice Secrets of my Soul” (23). Indeed, Madam Creswel foretells that, in heeding her advice, Dorothea will grow into a commendable and honourable whore, making her more famous than the “Corinthain Lais” (23) and other prostitutes whom she places upon a pedestal for Dorothea to admire.

Still, praise is used for more than motivation in *The Whores Rhetorick*. Indeed, it is the principle method for attracting and retaining clients. Madam Creswel does not hide the fact that flattery and hollow praises are critical components of the profession, making no attempt to counteract ancient accusations that whores are liars, especially in their use of rhetorical devices, and thus also that rhetoricians who use such devices are like whores. In other words, *The Whores Rhetorick* reinforces the suspicious alignment of orators and prostitudinal flattery that is a recurrent theme throughout ancient rhetorical treatises.¹⁷ As literary critic Joseph Pappa writes in *Carnal Reading: Early Modern Language and Bodies*, “rhetoric’s allure has a sexual

¹⁷ In his history of classical Greek rhetoric, W. Rhys Roberts points out, “The sophistical rhetoric attacked [by Plato] in the *Gorgias* is, with its fine language and fallacious arguments, no guide to truth, but is well fitted to delude the credulous and ignorant. It is an ‘artificer of persuasion,’ which shrinks from no device of flattery but panders to prejudice and tickles the palate with dainty, seductive words” (Roberts 4). Similarly, Quintilian warns that “others besides orators persuade by speaking or lead others to the conclusion desired, as for example, harlots, flatterers, and seducers” (II.xv:11; B 305).

suggestiveness that ‘charms,’ but it is also something that ‘cheats,’ like the bawds who ‘trappan’ helpless dupes in Restoration prostitution narratives” (199). The very methods of rhetoric in attracting interest and stimulating persuasion in the audience are akin to the seductive methods of a skilled prostitute with her clients, including extensive praise of everything the clients hold dear.

Nevertheless, *The Whores Rhetorick* makes no apologies for the whore’s flattery. Instead, it flaunts it, stipulating not only the manner but also the purpose of prostitutional praise. Madam Creswel advises Dorothea to use flattery to “please others, and enrich yourself” (50), presenting an image of female empowerment within a commercial economy. Any praise she gives must always be calculated as a business transaction, part of an exchange in which the other will pay with money: “Fancy your self subjugated by an inevitable decree to satisfie [sic] any the most lascivious appetite, provided he comes with Gold in his Purse, and is willing to purchase at your rates” (50). Strikingly content with this commercial agenda, Madam Creswel continually recommends extensive artificial praise of the client in order to win financial remuneration:

Exercise on this occasion the quintessence of your flattery and dissimulation, and with studied arts, and exquisite inventions, make it appear you have exceeded your passionate Squire, in all the effects of a profound and sincere love. After he is sufficiently convinced in this point, fancies himself the happiest man living in the fidelity and affection of his Mistress, and begins to brag of his bright possession, it will then be fit you should entertain some thoughts of seizing the Golden fleece. (60)

The remuneration for flattery involves not only immediate payment for a single act, but also the establishment of a reciprocal scene of praise that will lead to long term commercial benefits. It is not until her client begins to boast about her in public, that the prostitute can dream of becoming financially secure. His praise raises her price, as it were, making her more marketable than ever.¹⁸ As a savvy business woman, Madam Creswel advises Dorothea to keep her eyes on the potential profit, forgoing love or attraction for the higher goal of self-sufficiency.

Of course, as Madam Creswel admits, calculated praise does not always guarantee a positive response—“positive” referring not to sexual satisfaction or orgasm but to rich payment, the whore’s primary goal always being gold. Indeed, the good-looking “fops” can be quite fickle, being generous or miserly at whim, so the best men to please are the single bachelors who are inexperienced and most likely to praise the whore to comrades (50). Still, if clients are unfaithful, turning to other whores instead, Madam Creswel warns that it is foolish to try to win them back through praise. “[H]eaping honours on their undeserving heads; and stopping the mouths of the factious with preferment in the state” merely opens “a wide gap for anyone to manipulate you to their duty and allegiance” (58-59). Praise is permitted to be superficial and artificial, but it must be employed only in a suitable context, where the faithful are expected to play their respectful dues. In a scene where clients have turned away, the only way to win them back is through *pathos*, specifically the pretense of having been seduced by others and abandoned. Here the only praise left to give is praise of a client’s merciful kindness as the rescuer of a lady in distress.

For the ideal client, nevertheless, *The Whores Rhetorick* recommends as much praise as possible. Extending the passage with which this essay began, Madam Creswel expressly commands the rhetoric of praise, regardless of the quality of the items being praised:

¹⁸ It is to be noted that shrewd buyers in small markets refuse to praise anything while they are shopping. Even the slightest flaw in the product, the slightest deviation from a perfect copy, is a reason to request a lower price. The seller praises, the buyer negates, until one or the other compromises sufficiently to strike a bargain.

You must study a particular way of commending every thing he wears, the fitting of his shoes, the mixture of his Stockings, the shape of his Leg, his Tread, the turn up of his Breeches. . . . [t]he make of his Cloaths [sic]; the adjusting of his Sword knot and Cravat string, the briskness of his raillery, the fringe of his Gloves, his Lace, the smoothness of his Face, the redness of his Lip, his jantee [sic] way of picking his Teeth, the foretop of his Peruke, and if you please, the cock or the fitting of his Hat. (Anonymous 158)

Demonstrating the versatility of the prostitute's rhetorical invention, Madam Creswel claims that praise must be applied skillfully, with particularity, accumulating commendations that focus on everything from small clothing details to behavioral oddities. As such she gives an interesting twist to Cyprian Soarez's statement that "the proper function of praise is to amplify and adorn" (142).

There is, of course, some humour in the fine details that the old procuress recommends praising, which is in line with seventeenth century efforts to embellish style for the sake of appearing witty. Like second century writers in the Second Sophistic, who often amused themselves and others by writing in praise of smoke, mice, pots, salt, and bumblebees (Clarke 132), writers at court would have enjoyed the list of Madam Creswel's items. Courtly advancement depended on the praise of patrons, the praise of ladies, and the praise of wit, with amplification and metaphorical digressions being perfected as evidence for one's creative abilities. Parodying such praises while seeking to praise his friend Sir Thomas More in 1509, Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote a playful treatise *In Praise of Folly* (translated into English in 1688), which claims to be more sincere than "the general practice of our nobles and wise men who, throwing away all shame, hire some flattering orator or lying poet from whose mouth they may hear their praises, that is to say, mere lies." Erasmus then goes on to describe the "impudent flatterer" who "equals a man of nothing to the gods and proposes him as an absolute pattern of all virtue that's wholly a stranger to it, sets out a pitiful jay in other's feathers, washes the Blackmoor white, and lastly swells a gnat to an elephant" (2nd paragraph).

To a certain extent, everyone at Court was adept at praise, embroidering simple statements with entertaining flourishes to make the performer more memorable than the content. It is interesting, therefore, that in *The Whores Rhetorick*, when Madam Creswel advises Dorothea to praise everything about her client, including "his jantee way of picking his teeth" (158), Dorothea responds with hesitation. Perhaps aware that "praise can be ironic, a way of subtly identifying faults" (Kennedy *New* 62), Dorothea worries that superficial praise might be seen as condescension: "Will he not think I am abusing him?" (159). Although amplification normally is effective in conveying praise, especially when it incorporates concrete examples (Sullivan 340), an intensification of praise that is over-weighted toward appearance without any emphasis upon admirable action and without any counterpart of blame remains rhetorically questionable. As Quintilian points out, "The worst form of politeness, as it has come to be called, is that of mutual and indiscriminate applause For if every effusion is greeted with a storm of ready-made applause, care and industry come to be regarded as superfluous" (II.ii:10; B 215). Madam Creswel's elevation of "everything," including the most trivial and questionable features, undermines any sense of ideal good or value. Nevertheless, the old woman insists that such indiscriminate praise is necessary, "He would [be offended] if thou didst treat him after any other manner" (159). Flattery is the expected and preferred method for relaxing the prostitute's client. The implication is that any analogous praise is likewise a prostitudinal agency.

A more complex theatricality arises in *The Whores Rhetorick* when the whore is on the receiving end of praise. Imagining a scene with a client, Dorothea wonders what to do when he expresses praise for her in a simplistic love poem. Dorothea is tempted to throw the ditty away since she recognizes that it is just a hollow courtship ritual and since she has learned that she must not inspire love but payment. Madam Creswel's response, though, is as calculated as ever. She tells Dorothea to be quick to elevate the little poem, to "read it over, praise it, kiss it, and place it in your bosom"—not because it is a token of love but "for the love you bear his purse" (160). She must pretend to be enthralled so as to raise his self esteem, assuage his pride, and make him disposed to pay well for the attention he receives. Such pretended praise extends the theatricality of the whore's initial praises, requiring her to remain "in character" beyond the initial seduction. No wonder that whores and actors were seen as almost equivalent in the seventeenth-century.¹⁹ As literary historian Joseph Lenz notes in his study of "Base Trade: Theater as Prostitution, 'both the actor and the prostitute perform 'with a lewd intent of committing whoredome,' of beguiling the client with a simulated (but nonetheless stimulating) experience" (Lenz 840). Any praises uttered in such a context are to be recognized as simulations, designed to delude seductively.

Any praise uttered in a theatrical context is of course just a simulation, designed to manipulate the audience into consenting to the speaker's version of reality. It is surprising, therefore, to find Madam Creswel recommending not only praise of clients but also praise of competing whores: "I say you must put on a serene countenance, a pleasant look, and a Tongue dipt [sic] in Honey and Oyle [sic], when you happen to talk to any of your Servants of the other Whores about the Town" (181). Dorothea naturally resists, being concerned that "commending others equally [will] disparage one self" (181). But Madam Creswel sees the situation more opportunistically. Noting that a whore's praise might include "discrete reserves or equivocations" (181) so as to retain one's own power position, she declares that praise of rivals generally will increase one's appearance of honesty and lack of bias, thus adding credibility to one's professional identity. Like an experienced rhetorician, she admits that praise can contribute to the agent's *ethos* if what is praised aligns with the audience's sense of goodness, regardless of whether or not that *ethos* is founded in reality or in simulation.

Still, the very acknowledgement of simulation seems to offset the deceptive thrust of praise. Throughout the text, Madam Creswel insinuates that the excessive display she recommends is necessarily fake, her "real" experience being much different than the warm and praising appearance she generates. Her constructed appearance of satisfaction serves as praise for her clients' abilities as lovers, thus enhancing their egos and their willingness to pay for her services. Yet beneath her pretended pleasure, she is dead to all but financial reward, being in fact "more physically mortified than a nun" (221). Indeed, Creswel tells Dorothea that a whore's identity is split in two: she must lead her "mate to believe that [she is] melted, dissolved, and wholly consumed in pleasure, though Ladies of large business are generally no more moved by

¹⁹Joseph Lenz notes that Puritan opponents of the British theatre from its inception in the 1750's to its prohibition in 1642 "consistently associated the theater with prostitution" (833). These puritanical opponents considered theatre-goers to be subjected to the same deceits and temptations as if they entered a brothel: "the spectacle of a player strutting his stuff upon the stage was virtually the same as that of a prostitute strutting hers or his upon the street: both lure citizens and whet appetites" (838-839). By the time the theatres were reopened in 1660, the connections were heightened further by the sexual explicitness of the actors. "The boy actor tricked up in women's clothing is conceived, literally and figurally, as whore, a simulation or 'counterfeyt doing' that can provide only false pleasure" (840).

an imbrace [sic], than if they were made of Wood or Stone” (202). What this numbness presumably preserves is her integrity as a business woman, even as it denounces all credibility as a genuine praiser of her clients. Still, clients know what they are paying for, in contrast to a preacher who leads his congregation toward “spiritual ejaculations and enthusiastic raptures” (189) through simulated emotions and a forked tongue. Describing such a preacher, Madam Creswel calls him a “seducing Shepherd” (190), considering him far more hypocritical than a Whore since the Whore at least acknowledges her own insincerity and is publicly acknowledged as such.

Although the metaphor of prostitutional praise implies that praise in *The Whores Rhetorick* is only oriented toward profit and self-interest, a now-obsolete meaning of the verb “prostitute” was still being used in 1683, when the book was published: “to offer with complete devotion or self-negation; to devote” (“Prostitute” Def.v.3a.). This meaning captures an honorable purpose of ideal praise: selfless devotion to a cause, principle, or virtue. To be fully praiseworthy, one must deny self-interest and prostitute oneself to goodness.²⁰ As we have seen, Madam Creswel does not understand such devotion, nor does she find it when she attends church. Nevertheless, near the end of *The Whores Rhetorick*, Dorothea does reveal such selfless devotion when she utters words of praise for her old instructor: “For Heavens sake, Madam, how came you to be so well read? Yesterday you quoted Seneca, you have talkt [sic] of Law, Politicks, a number of words not understood by me, and indeed I think nothing but Divinity escaped you” (210). Whereas throughout the dialogue Dorothea asks questions and presents counter arguments to the old whore’s advice, by the end she increasingly speaks in a tone of admiration. “You are resolved to make me an accomplished Lady” (211). Indeed, despite the old woman’s hacking cough, which has Dorothea rightfully concerned, Dorothea remarks that “You talk youthfully, Mother” (211). It is true that these praises could simply be a ploy on Dorothea’s part to mollify Madam Creswel, revealing how well she has learned her lessons of seduction.²¹ But Dorothea seems genuinely grateful to her instructor, willing to devote her life to the prostitutional cause. One gets the impression that she is still innocent enough to experience what twentieth century Kenneth Burke calls the “lift” associated with praise: even “sheer hypocritical flattery for an ulterior purpose retains something of the ‘lift’ that informs the act of praising at its best” (56). That lift is the uncalculated gift of praise, breaking free and moving beyond the manipulations of self-serving rhetors and prostitutes.

Although the author of *The Whores Rhetorick* satirically presents the prostitution of praise as hollow sophistry, he also hints at the opposite, the idea that praise can promote virtue, inspire imitation, and offer complete devotion to a higher power or principle. Like any satire, the text reinforces ideal values even as it mocks the perversions that society perpetuates. Indeed, if readers of the satire are intended to avoid the deceptions revealed in the text, then readers might also recognize the varieties and complexities of praise, noting that praise can be prostituted to goodness as much as it is to money or self-interest, encouraging future heroic or virtuous action.

²⁰Aristotle claims that “in praising and blaming, the speakers do not ask whether the deeds of a man were expedient or hurtful; nay, they often set it down to his praise that he performed some noble act at a sacrifice of his own advantage” (Aristotle 1.3:1359; C 18).

²¹Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, admits that “eagerness to praise may also imply fear of not praising” especially when the motive of praise is “mollifying the angry” (55). As well, thankful praise of a gift could be “secondarily a plea for future favors” (55).

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