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DISPOSABLE (TEXTUAL) BODIES: POPULAR PROSTITUTE NARRATIVES AND THE COMPOSITE NOVEL

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ABSTRACT. The present article compares two coeval authors, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) and Jane Barker (1652–1732), who stand on opposite sides of the political and religious spectrum, to analyse the ways in which they engage with popular prostitute stories in *Moll Flanders* (1722) and the *Patch-Work* narratives (1723, 1726), respectively. This contribution, then, offers novel insights into these writers' work, exploring the ways in which Defoe rewrites this form of popular fiction to conform to his middle-class fantasy of personal development, and how Barker responds both to Defoe's tales of prostitute ascent and the general taste for this fiction from her own ideological perspective. It will also expose their similarities, as they construct composite literary bodies of many different prostitute narratives, and emphasize the need to understand the novel as an assemblage of voices, genres and sociomaterial aspects.

Keywords: novel, canon, popular fiction, intertextuality, textual assemblage, prostitute narrative.

CUERPOS (TEXTUALES) DESECHABLES: NARRACIONES POPULARES SOBRE PROSTITUTAS Y LA NOVELA COMPUESTA

RESUMEN. El presente artículo compara dos autores coetáneos, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) y Jane Barker (1652–1732), los cuales ocupan posiciones políticas y religiosas opuestas, para analizar las maneras en las que dialogan con las populares historias de prostitutas en *Moll Flanders* (1722) y las novelas *Patch-Work* (1723, 1726), respectivamente. Esta contribución, pues, ofrece novedosas perspectivas sobre la obra de ambos, al explorar la manera en la que Defoe reescribe esta forma de ficción popular para responder a su fantasía de desarrollo personal de clase media, y cómo Barker responde tanto a los relatos de ascenso de la prostituta de Defoe, como al gusto general por este tipo de ficción, desde su propia perspectiva ideológica. También expondrá sus similitudes, ya que construyen cuerpos literarios compuestos de diferentes narrativas de prostitutas, y enfatizará la necesidad de entender la novela como un ensamblaje de voces, géneros y aspectos sociomateriales.

Palabras clave: novela, canon, ficción popular, intertextualidad, ensamblaje textual, narraciones sobre prostitutas.

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In 1732 William Hogarth produced a popular series of engravings titled *A Harlot's Progress*, which, together with his subsequent *A Rake's Progress* (1734-35), evince the appeal of those lives that deviated from the norm. Hogarth's harlot starts as a young girl newly arrived in London who meets a procuress, later to descend into the state of mistress, prostitute, inmate of Bridewell prison, diseased body, and, finally, a disposable one, in a coffin surrounded by insincere mourners. Her progress is clearly drawn downwards, in a pattern of descent, disease, and death. Hogarth's story is, in fact, graphically reproducing popular coeval narratives depicting the fall or rise of a prostitute or courtesan, for the entertainment or instruction of their audience.

A form of popular culture, it is necessary to reconsider these well-read texts in dialogue with more established works that have found their place in academia, to provide a more comprehensive picture of what was being read and how, and the ways in which canonical and popular culture must be understood together in context. These reflections provide a less categorical approach, which perceives eighteenth-century fiction as a network of texts that dialogued with and enriched each other, an assemblage of different popular cultures that appealed to a varied audience and construct a more inclusive and wide-ranging understanding of this period's literary production. It therefore supports the idea that the novel, in particular, comes into existence as an assemblage, being "a polyphonic (heteroglossic) assemblage of voices … a composite of genres … an assemblage of materials" (Brown 271), but also a locus for the blending of the historical, political, sociological, and literary.

In that line, the present article places together two coeval authors, Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) and Jane Barker (1652–1732), who nevertheless stand on opposite sides of the political and religious spectrum, and write very different fiction, to explore the ways in which they engage with these popular prostitute stories in *Moll Flanders* (1722) and the *Patch-Work* narratives (1723, 1726), respectively. Whereas Defoe has been previously associated with this genre, or its sibling, the rogue narrative (Watt; Richetti, *Popular Fiction*; Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce*; Smith; Borham-Puyal, *Contemporary Rewritings*), Barker has not been studied under the light of her fiction's intertextual relation with this form of criminal biography, nor have these authors' works stood in comparison regarding their use of this genre. This contribution, then, offers new insights into these writers' oeuvre, exploring the ways in which Defoe rewrites this form of popular fiction to fit his middle-class fantasy of personal development, and how Barker responds both to Defoe's tales of prostitute ascent and the general taste for this fiction from her own vantage point as a Jacobite woman writer. In this comparative approach, formal similarities, such as their address to the reader, their reflection on genre, or their engagement with the prostitute story, will be seen to be placed at the service of divergent readings of society, proving the idea that these narratives could be understood as *socioliterary assemblages*, in which a composite form can serve to reflect a complex reality.

1. THE PROSTITUTE AND HER STORY: COMMODITIES TO BE CONSUMED

In the early eighteenth-century there existed a production and marketing of popular literature that blended "instruction, entertainment, ostensible simplicity and affordable prices" (Bertelsen 61), and that paradoxically "intermeshed with an emergent middle class and an expropriating elite as to make drawing of distinct lines of aesthetic or material demarcation virtually impossible" (62), a form of "sociomaterial assemblages"[1] that brought together peoples from different backgrounds and contexts by means of popular performance and production. It is pertinent, then, to speak of varied "popular cultures in shifting and ambiguous relationship to each other and to a variegated elite culture", a type of "non-categorical approach" made the more compelling by considering that in the eighteenth-century "commerce was transforming the traditional relationship of 'high' and 'low' and producing a commercialised 'popular culture'" (Bertelsen 62). This blending of the high and the low moved beyond the class of the intended audience and can be perceived as well in how popular literature often became the foundation for more elite literary productions that have lived on in Western culture as canonical creations.

Among these forms of popular and highly ephemeral literature were the biographies, chapbooks, songs, poems, or broadsheets devoted to different criminal

[1] I am adapting Bill Brown's term applied to the right of assemblage, which assembles people "assembled elsewhere" and combines "persons, images, things" (302). I believe that concept illustrates this shared coming together by popular spectacle or literature as described in the following paragraphs.

figures of the time, among them highwaymen or prostitutes. These forms of cheap print capitalised on the interest in the lives and adventures of these characters, often providing "a cross-fertilisation of text and performance" (Bertelsen 73) by their appearance linked to public trials or executions. An extremely popular spectacle among the working classes, the Tyburn hangings

> generated preliminary publicity in the form of criminal speeches, confessions, biographies and ballads which in turn assured large turnouts for the events and a ready assembled market for further literary selling. Having read or heard a fictional last dying speech or ballad or short biography of the condemned, the London populace could then experience the real thing in what must have been an excruciatingly tense moment of public theatre. (Bertelsen 74)

Riding through the crowded streets or being granted the chance to speak their final words gave those condemned a performative platform from which journalistic and fictional accounts could feed the appetite of the voracious consumers of such public spectacles and criminal stories. Thus, given an appealing outlaw subject "an extended and various body of work encompassing almost all popular genres and extending to more sophisticated spin-offs in the form of novels (*Moll Flanders, Jonathan Wild*) and plays (*The Beggar's Opera*)" could be generated (Bertelsen 74). Criminal subjects–their literal and literary lives and bodies–are then immersed in an increasingly capitalist and consumerist culture in which they become objects of popular rapid consumption, a source of entertainment and a moral warning. They respond, then, to the notion of "abjected" or "delegitimized" bodies that barely count as human bodies at all (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 15) in their nature as outcasts and source of spectacle; they are "disposable" as victims of forces of exploitation, poverty, violence, or sexual discrimination (Butler, *Dispossession*), as disposable human and cultural capital in the excesses of a consumerist society. Emphasising this ephemerality and cultural abjectivity is the fact that the criminal textual bodies which lasted in the literary legacy of the eighteenth century were those that abandoned the realm of the popular and were inserted into the canon of sanctioned works of fiction–mostly written by men, as in the three instances quoted by Bertelsen–until recovered by the work of new schools of literary criticism.

Prostitute narratives flourished during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, taking the form of different genres: "whore dialogues", "whore letters", "whore biographies", or the "scandal chronicle"[2] (Olsson viii-ix), which highlighted the "more negative and unruly forces of the public" and their "appetite for gossip"

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[2] Olsson includes this genre for its obvious similarities with the more explicit prostitute narrative. In the seventeenth century the 'scandalous chronicle' included characters disguised to live a libertine life or roman-a-clèf in which real characters were hidden under pseudonyms, while in the eighteenth century we also find 'scandalous memoirs' of lives of pleasure, especially among women who were trying to justify or vindicate themselves (Thompson; Breashears). Katherine Binhammer defines the "scandalous autobiography" as the "more fact-based sister genre" of the "whore's story" (61). However, the term is open to some controversy as proven by Breashears.

(Eger et al. 9). The different genres have been categorised by Laura Rosenthal into two strands, the libertine and the sentimental, which vary in their approaches to sexuality and the agency given to their heroine, yet share their exploration of economic mobility–most notably upwards in libertine fiction, mainly downwards in the sentimental one–and their portrayal of prostitution as pointing to "emerging forms of social disruption, including global commerce, empire building, economic mobility, commodification, reliance on waged labor, the market in luxury goods, new forms of gender identity, and changing attitudes towards sexuality" ("Introduction" xx-xxi). This is in line with Ellis and Lewis's understanding of prostitution as becoming an assemblage of sexual, economic, and social dimensions (3), and as "plac[ing] the construction of femininity at the centre of the properly philosophical debates over the nature of the commercial impetus in eighteenth-century capitalism" (11). These critics also perceived those two approaches, the libertine which "sees her as an agent of corruption, a libertine seducer of men and a fornicating sinful adulteress, inhabiting a violent world of excessive consumption, insatiable desire, criminal behaviour and bestial depravity", and a sentimental construction that transforms her "from a criminal to a victim, from an agent of sin to an object of compassion" (11). Katherine Binhammer, in her exploration of the later Magdalen histories, further distinguishes between a "radical and a conservative telling of seduction" in these sentimental tales, between "the portrayal of the sentimental prostitute as a virtuous love object versus representing her as an abject victim" (61). While these narratives emphasise the "prostitute's relationship to a new commercial marketplace" at the same time they "sentimentalized their fall" (42), what this scholar terms radical retellings focus more on the "moral corruption within Britain's emerging consumer culture" or the "moral bankruptcy" of the "sexual and economic system" that limits women's employment opportunities (58-59), whereas both the "libertine" and the "bourgeois sentimental" narratives of seduced women share the reduction of women to love and sex (31).

Despite these differences, what all prostitute narratives–whether in the libertine or sentimental form, whether based on fact or not–do have in common is that they offer the prostitute and her story to avid consumers. At this time one of the euphemisms for female genitalia was, precisely, "commodity" (Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 6), emphasising that the female body is what is to be bought and consumed. The same could be said of fiction, where the plights of young women were aestheticized for the pleasure of an audience, often in the sentimental theme of "virtue in distress" in which women were "expected to suffer" (Brissenden 84). Even if these narratives avoid explicitness or present the prostitute as a social victim, they still leave her "vulnerable to erotic voyeurism" (Rosenthal, "Introduction" xxi). Just as these women instrumentalize their bodies, or are instrumentalized by their clients, pimps, or bawds, so are their textual bodies consumed and disposed of in the shape of the cheap prints that carry their stories. Examples range from Hogarth's harlot to broadsheets and songs on Sally Salisbury, a celebrated and wealthy courtesan sent to prison for stabbing her lover, whose story then blended the textual and the performative by her role as public felon whose court case was avidly followed, and who tragically died in prison. Her crime, with an illustration of the

stabbing, was included in the Newgate Calendar, while cheap prints circulated during her trial.[3] Longer versions of her life and sexual exploits were published; one of them, Charles Walker's, after the author posted advertisements to gather anecdotes (Walker 1). This narrative is divided into chapters pertaining to the different stages of her life, and includes poems and letters from various addressees, creating a polyphonic composite of tales or pictures that attempt to portray the singular character of Sally. These unsentimental and picaresque patches were pieced together by Walker, who assumes the role of faithful editor (10, 68) and wishes to divide his retelling into two volumes, given the "Impatience of the Publick" and her "many Feats" (68), which would grant his editorial success at the avid consumption of her story. In these retellings of Sally's story, she is reduced to anecdotes from her lovers, with little attention to her interiority. If selling an "intimate part of the self to the marketplace" can be considered "the most tragic form of human alienation possible" (Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 14), Sally and her sisters experience that alienation twice as they become textual selves exploited by the cultural marketplace.

However, besides their commercial appeal, the prostitutes' narratives of social ascent or descent serve their authors to "explore anxieties generated by the increasingly mobile world of eighteenth-century society" (Rosenthal, "Introduction" xx), in which middle-class women might fall, or low ones might rise through earned wealth or even advantageous marriages–the latter having its echo in some courtesans' real life. They moreover expose the lack of opportunities for women and the frailty of their circumstances based on sexual reputation. These stories also highlight the porous nature of social and economic boundaries because the prostitutes' access to luxury imported goods and fashions and their recurrent position as trend-setters (Rosenthal, "Introduction" xxiv) breached the divide between "the visible and illicit prostitute and the invisible respectable woman" (Attwood 6), and between public appearance and private activity.

These issues are explored in what are now termed more canonical works of fiction, proving the notion that these genres dialogue with the mainstream novel of the mid-eighteenth century. An example would be Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), in which the heroine is raped in a house of disrepute, with the complicity of a mannish madam, yet escapes the fate of women previously associated to Lovelace, who must resort to prostitution to survive. She is expected to do the same, but is spared the "distress of her poorer sisters" (Brissenden 86), and "*heroically* resists prostitution" (Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 14; my emphasis). Richardson, in fact, proves apt in this commercialization of women's suffering and sexual threats, first with Pamela's harassment, then with Clarissa's sexual assault–which shocked readers, but the author considered the triumph of virtue (Binhammer 21)–, and finally with his use of prostitution as little more than context for his plot or to create opposing anti-heroines for his female moral exemplar. Binhammer records his

[3] The broadsheet published in 1723 followed the tradition of building a morality tale out of this unlikely heroine's example. On her story see Richetti *(Popular Fiction)* and Rosenthal *(Nightwalkers)*.

sympathetic response to sentimental narratives of innocent victims of seduction forced by reduced circumstances into prostitution, and his support of the Magdalen project (40). Yet his prostitutes are conniving and collaborate with Lovelace; they are hypocritical in their appearance of reform and solidarity. They also dressed as ladies to deceive Clarissa better, breaching the above-mentioned boundaries, as later Moll would do dressing as a fine lady. Richardson then exposes the conventional narratives on prostitution and the value placed on virtue as part of women's commodification. On her part, in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), Arabella mistakes a disguised prostitute for a heroine (336), and the story of Miss Groves, a ruined woman, stands in contrast to the heroine's more virtuous path towards marriage (69-78, 141-142). In these now canonical texts, and others from this period, the prostitutes serve "as negative versions of the heroine, their lives a haunting alternative to domestic virtue" (Rosenthal, "Introduction" xi). They are little more than disposable textual bodies, who easily disappear from the narrative, although still leaving a trace of the popular fiction around outcast women that inspired them. In this sense, with their unstable position between fact and fiction, history and literature, prostitute narratives could "offer a counterbalance to and complication of the picture of eighteenth-century culture one might draw from reading the more familiar canon of fiction" (Rosenthal, "Introduction" xxvi).

Still, these outcast women also become more than secondary characters, for these forms of popular culture come to serve as a basis for works of fiction studied today as epitomes of the literature of their time, among them Daniel Defoe's novels and Jane Barker's framed-narrative, both of which explore the sexual and financial politics around women's bodies and virtue by appropriating some of the clichés of these popular works. Both authors' works precede by thirty years the foundation of the Magdalen hospital and the overflow of publications on its penitents, yet will be seen to advance many of the narrative conventions and socio-economic readings of these popular stories that counted Richardson among their readers.

2. 'CANONIZING' HER VOICE AND STORY: VENTRILOQUISM OF THE SELF-MADE WOMAN IN DEFOE'S NOVELS

Always attuned to popular genres, in *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*, published in 1722, Daniel Defoe, the same author who assembled fact and fiction in his imitation of narratives of stranded sailors, now adopts the genre of the prostitute narrative to go beyond the simplified scandalous story of the broadsheets, poems, songs, and longer biographies that detailed the lives of famous courtesans, yet following many of the conventions of the more positive retellings, such as the story of the rise to fame and fortune of Kitty Fisher, a well-known mistress. The preface, in fact, opens with a call to attention to the type of private histories his own production has as a model:

> The World is so taken up of late with Novels and Romances, that it will be hard for a private History to be taken for Genuine, where the Names and other Circumstances of the person are concealed, and on this Account we must be

> content to leave the Reader to pass his own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, and take it just as he pleases. (3)

This paragraph–in this instance recalling titles such as “The Genuine History” or “Authentick Memoirs” of Sally and preceding the “Histories” of the Magdalen penitents–contraposes genres distinguished by their claim to fiction and fact, respectively, at the same time it complicates matters by hinting at the scandalous chronicles, in which fake names could hide actual people. Defoe’s appreciation for the genre of “genuine biography” is, for Ian Watt, evinced in how he always passes his works off as “authentic autobiography” (120), being *Moll* no exception.

Defoe was aware of the blending of the “mixture of the literal and the allegorical in fiction” (Richetti, *Popular Fiction* 32) and insists that his “moral meaning is as important as the literal truth of the story” (*Popular Fiction* 33), conscious of the need for popular fiction to justify itself “as a worth-while pastime” (33). If the prostitute narrative’s appeal was greatly based on its factual nature and its proximity to the scandalous chronicle, which encourages readers to discover the thinly veiled identities of the characters, Defoe’s text again blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, as he had done with *Robinson Crusoe*, inspired by factual accounts, yet open to the accusation of being nothing but fiction.[4] It will not be the only similarity between these two works. Defoe uses in both novels the narrative conventions associated to the genre of the “history” to build fiction as a locus of personal and social truth, in which, paradoxically, the familiarity of the narrative conventions becomes evidence of their authenticity, as Binhammer states of the penitents’ stories, where deviation from convention could be met with accusations of insincerity (61-64). On the other hand, despite resorting to these conventions, factual or fictional tales enable these anonymous women to be individuated (Binhammer 65), which Defoe does by transforming his Moll into another instance of the construction of a “characteristic product of modern individualism” (Watt 105), providing his character with literary truth and presenting the social and economic forces at play with verisimilar skill. That is, his fiction enables the prostitute to become an individual rather than a type, even if her life story is modelled on innumerable others and their episodic narrative.

Connected to the idea of composite writing, Defoe’s now canonical novel offers striking formal similarities to the popular stories of prostitute progression or descent, with “vividly realized individual episodes, separated by rather flat, bridging sections of narrative, as Moll’s life progresses to its predetermined conclusion” (Bree xiv); in fact, as Bree underlines, the “typical features of the looping of a plot to link cause and effect, past and future, are almost entirely absent” (xiv). Most notably, Watt describes this work with the term “patchwork” (112), highlighting its structure as a series of passages with a connective framework and its episodic nature (117); a point

[4] One of such accusations was Charles Gildon’s *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Mr. D- De F-, of London, Hosier* (1719), where he accused Defoe of being a liar who had “forged a story” and imposed it “upon the world as Truth”, as the real account of a mariner from York named Robinson Crusoe.

also made by Richetti, who refers to Defoe's technique as patching together different elements (*English Novel* 63), all of which recalls Barker's epithet for and technique in her own narrative.[5] Defoe, then, follows in structure these popular stories, which are "commonly episodic" (Rosenthal, "Introduction" xiii), falling short of creating "the new form", the "novel", given its lack of "intrinsic coherence", among other characteristics (Watt 147), yet also proving that the "invention" of the novelistic form mainly results from the re-fashioning of literary genres already in place, in the "novelization" of pre-existing discourses (Cascardi 59).

With echoes of both the libertine and the sentimental subgenres, Defoe's *Moll* and his later *Roxana* are indeed both stories of social descent and ascent, of misery and triumph, of regret and pride (Attwood 149). Focusing on Moll, she undertakes the well-trodden path of "sin, repentance, and redemption" (Bree xvi), yet complicated by the relevance of materialism in this economic tale of social mobility, with clear echoes of Defoe's greatest success. From its very title, which gives a full account of her story, it is possible to perceive her early descent, only to rise in wealth and appearance of respectability at the end: from whore, bigamist, thief, and felon, to rich, honest, and penitent, a progression that Defoe highlights with his use of italics.[6] With its promise of fortunes and misfortunes together with his heroine's redemption, it echoes those publications printed as moral warnings, the preface declaring that this is "a Work from every part of which something may be learned, and some just and religious Inference is drawn, by which the Reader will have something of Instruction, if he pleases to make use of it" (5). This address to the audience will be seen as well in Barker, in her own encouragement to the reader to piece the story together to find the "secret" it keeps (Swenson, "Representing Modernity" 57, 59), which points to these authors' use of this form with an ideological purpose, with a message to be deciphered, even if different in their framing of the episodic patches and their reading of the prostitute narrative genre.

In fact, contrary to Barker's later moral conclusions, Defoe parodies these moralist conversion narratives with an unreliable narrator that is only too willing to justify herself, and who, as stated in the preface, "was not so extraordinary a Penitent, as she was at first" (6). In the last lines of the novel, Moll claims that she decided to "spend the Remainder of our Years in sincere Penitence, for the wicked Lives we had lived" (285), yet much of that same paragraph, for example, is used to excuse her past behaviour in the matter of her incest: her husband is said to be "perfectly easy on the Account", that "it was no Fault of [hers]", "a Mistake impossible to be prevented", the blame is placed on her brother's "vile part" (285), with no

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[5] Interestingly, Swenson records the same opinions on Defoe's *Crusoe*, while she also argues how this contributes to its standing as a modern novel that problematizes the building of narrative as well as the construction of a world though narrative ("Robinson Crusoe" 16).

[6] The full title famously reads as follows: "THE FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES of the FAMOUS *Moll Flanders*, &c. Who was born in NEWGATE, and during a Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a *Whore*, five times a *Wife* (whereof once to her own Brother) Twelve Years a *Thief*, Eight Year a Transported *Felon* in Virginia, at last grew *Rich*, liv'd *Honest,* and died a *Penitent*".

responsibility attributed to her for having kept it a secret. She then concludes her story advancing the later sentimental prostitute–and the sentimental distressed heroine in general–in a happy resolution in sync with Defoe's more 'radical' and less conservative reading: displacing the blame to her circumstances, relating that after the "Fatigues" and "Miseries" she has gone through, she is now "in good Heart and Health"–not to mention wealth–living happily with her husband. Nevertheless, her criminal condition irrupts to the very end in this picture of domestic bliss to remind the reader of who she has been, with the reference to her incest and her claim that she "perform'd much more than the limited Terms of my Transportation" (285). The criminal and the sentimental, the economic and the moral, blend in Defoe's ending, as they have done in his novel, which provides a more radical approach to the required narrative of penitence by its rejection of the final return to institutional control–whether a nunnery, Bridewell, or submission in marriage–or of redemptive death.

For Moll is not a passive victim of the circumstances. From the very start she wishes to escape the boundaries of birth, class, and servitude, to become a "gentlewoman" (10), understood by Moll as a self-employed woman (12). In her youthful innocence, she provides a more bourgeois significance to the term, and even uses it to describe a woman who, unbeknownst to her, is a madam of "ill Fame" (12) and whom Moll aspires to imitate in life (13). Defoe, then, exposes the permeable boundaries of class when defined by money, and responds to his context's concerns about the increasing difficulty to distinguish the differences. And in so doing, Defoe creates a female character who, very much like Crusoe, is a self-made person, a "businesswoman" (Bree xxi), an instance of the earlier Restoration prostitute narratives of "empowerment, luxury and social rebellion", of a "rise to wealth and status through ambition and ruthlessness" (Figueroa 38) and the later "tradesman-whore" (Binhammer 50), whose skill, resources and outcome are comparable to Defoe's male protagonist. She is independent, skilled, and ingenious, rising above her dire settings and conditions to become wealthier, but also to own land on which she commands over others. She is concerned with money, and with her own decreasing worth in the market: she understands herself as a commodity and strategizes around that notion, moving from whore to wife, although the narrative highlights the similarities in these positions. When she sells her virginity, Moll states: "being forsaken of my Vertue, and my Modesty, I had nothing of Value left to recommend me, either to God's Blessing, or Man's Assistance" (25). Virtue and modesty, proclaimed as necessary tokens in a marriageable girl, determine one's value in the marriage market, one that also commodifies women's bodies as sources for pleasure and heirs.[7] In fact, Moll seems to fare better as a convicted felon than

[7] Schofield provides instances of this commodification of virtue in the prostitute's narratives and in the general narrativization of women's lives in the eighteenth-century ("Descending Angels" 186-187), while Binhammer explores how the prostitute's story "unmasks many of the ideological assumptions that come to be true about bourgeois marriage", among them that "virginity is a woman's highest commodity", and "makes a feminist argument about how

a traditional wife and mother, in appearance choosing the form of commodification that grants more agency, although being forced to remain on the margins of respectable society. In that sense, his ending contradicts the proclaimed moral, for there is no real punishment for Moll.

Defoe, then, seems to write admiringly of this woman who is "negotiating success" (Bree xix) in a hostile society with limited options available to women. The preface highlights this message, again drawing clear parallelisms with his previous novel and hero:

> Her application to a sober Life, and *industrious Management* at last in Virginia, with her Transported Spouse, is a Story fruitful of Instruction, to all the unfortunate Creatures who are oblig'd to seek their Re-establishment abroad; whether by the Misery of Transportation, *or other Disaster*; letting them know, that *Diligence and Application* have their due Encouragement, *even in the remotest Parts of the World*, and that no Case can be so low, so despicable, or *so empty of Prospect*, but that an *unwearied Industry* will go a great way to deliver us from it, will in time raise the meanest Creature to *appear again in the World,* and *give him a new Cast for his Life*. (5-6, my emphasis)

Despite this positive reading of Moll as a female version of Crusoe, there are significant differences. Although they are both illustrations of Defoe's *homo economicus* (Watt 105, 107, 125),[8] Moll's selfishness and fall from grace would have been perceived as greater, for she does not abandon her parents, but her offspring, and she must resort to crime rather than domestic undertakings. In fact, Defoe presents an interesting gender reversal in that Crusoe is, in Pat Rogers's words, more a "homemaker" than an adventurer, more a proprietor than a pioneer (375), and the opposite could be said of Moll. Whereas for much of the narrative (28 years) Crusoe stays in one place and builds a home and a community, taking care of living beings, Moll has a rambling life in which she leaves everyone behind, including her various children. This roguish approach complicates the possible sentimental sympathy towards her by offering the portrait of an unfeeling mother who abandons her progeny, or who even steals from a child and considers, for a moment, murdering him (162). This would have been read as unnatural inclinations in a woman, therefore in tune with a sexual marketplace dominated by men (Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce* 10; Smith 51), in which powerful courtesans, such as Sally, are often described in gender ambiguous terms, defined by their "masculine pleasures" and rakishness (Walker 4).

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the wife and the prostitute are linked by women's financial dependence on men" (52). These considerations led to the discussion at this time of the notion of marriage as 'legal prostitution'.

[8] Similarly, Richetti compares Crusoe and Roxana as exemplars of the "Mandevillean pattern whereby individual and selfish action (vice) produces social benefits – an increase in the production of goods and services, a contribution to the accumulation and circulation of wealth that constitutes an economically healthy society (as Defoe would have defined it)" (*English Novel* 65).

Given all these considerations, it is understandable that *Moll Flanders* was included in the history of the modern novel as a vehicle for middle-class capitalist values (Watt 128), and for its advancement of social and formal realism. And yet its imitation of the prostitute narrative complicates this inclusion from a formal perspective. Not only because of its episodic nature, but by sacrificing plausibility in Moll's "freedom from the probable psychological and social consequences of everything she does" (Watt 127-128), which echoes the unapologetic narrative of Sally, among others, more intent on entertaining the audience than presenting a verisimilar psychological portrait. Part of the rogue's or picaro's appeal is the quality of rising above the circumstances, of outsmarting the law, and working the system to their advantage, and Defoe withdraws from condemning his character to the kind of social death that later heroines would experience. In this, Defoe also sacrifices plausibility: Sally and other famous felons are punished for their crimes, with her bleak ending in prison strikingly different to Moll's experience in Newgate and subsequent liberation. It is then possible to disagree with Watt when he sees the source of Defoe's narrative as the "authentic biography" rather than the semi-fictional ones of rogues (120):[9] Defoe, as has been claimed, uses the narrative conventions of a genre in which fact and fiction are difficult to distinguish–even in the case of famous scandalous memoirists whose stories were grounded on events known by the public (Joule)–and which in the later part of the century became so popular and formulaic that it even influenced factual accounts of prostitutes who wished to gained public sympathy (Binhammer 61-64). In that sense, it would be possible to describe his novel as a composite, an assemblage of multiple stories and models of popular prostitute narratives, unified under the history of one particular woman.

Subsequent abridgments and chapbooks simplified further Moll's social and economic development story, reducing her crimes, or focusing mainly on them (Bree xxiii); a fact that would highlight the engagement of Defoe with the literary market of his time, for he created a piece of "popular" and "ephemeral" fiction (Watt 111), not even carefully edited given its cheapness. Surely because of its belonging to the prostitute autobiography genre, it "became associated with entertainment for the lower orders" (Bree xxii), rather than a work with scenes that would be welcomed by "cultivated minds" (Chalmers qtd in Bree xxv). In one of the ironies of literary history, Defoe's text sprang from a dismissed form of popular fiction, became famous through cheap popular print, and is now studied as a classic, very much the road *Crusoe* travelled, proving once more the artificial divide created between high and low culture, and that ephemeral texts retelling the lives of marginal people are significant in the understanding of the history of the (canonical) novel.

[9] Watt never explicitly employs the term "prostitute biography", using only the more general "rogue biography". I believe this is why he states that it is not known how much Defoe is indebted to "any particular formal model in writing" or that "the actual prototype of the heroine, if any, has not been established" (119).

3. SETTING HER STORY AS EXAMPLE: BARKER'S TRAIL OF LEWD WOMEN

Moving on to a very different text, Jane Barker opens her *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies,* published in 1723, with the following lines: "*But I doubt my Reader will say, ... why a* HISTORY *reduc'd into* Patches? *especially since* HISTORIES *at* Large *are so Fashionable in this Age*; *viz.* Robinson Crusoe, *and* Moll Flanders; *Colonel* Jack, *and* Sally Salisbury; *with many other* Heroes *and* Heroines?" *(Patch-Work* 51, italics in original). Interestingly, Barker also starts her work with a reflection on genre. She employs the same term as Defoe: history, with its associations to unity of character and verisimilitude; then enumerates three of his novels as examples, two of which revolve around outcast or criminal characters, such as Moll and Jack, and places Crusoe and Moll at the same level as the semi-fictional accounts of the life of Sally and Jack. Among Defoe's novels, it is also interesting that the latter is based on an actual criminal, whereas Moll is probably a composite of prostitutes with not one live counterpart. This points to the conflation of the true biography and the fictional one, as they shared plot and character development, as well as alleged moral intentions. Hers, on the other hand, is a history explicitly reduced to patches, fragmented, which would suggest her interruption of a lineal ascending story of material and social success, challenging Defoe's narrative of personal and entrepreneurial development. Moreover, Barker reverses the individuation of the prostitute as heroine, assembling the different passages to create a social collage rather than a story on a particular individual, focusing more obviously on didactic narrative conventions than life-like details, with very deterministic conclusions for her female characters that read almost like moral fables. This textual collage is composed of well-known stories revolving around fallen heirs and heiresses and duped working-class women who become not self-employed but unemployable, which bursts Defoe's middle-class fantasy of a trading gentlewoman. The tension between realism and romance, inherited wealth, and self-made fortunes, exposes Defoe and Barker as two paradigmatic examples of the tensions identified by Michael McKeon in his history of the English novel, yet complicates them by evincing how both writers projected their political and social readings onto the same literary popular genre, the prostitute biography, in line with the use made of it in the previous century by partisan authors for their Royalist or Tory propaganda (Figueroa 38). This reinforces the idea of intertextual richness, that the history of the novel is built on "partisan versions of realism" which were "competing for cultural dominance" (Carnell 8), and that the exaltation of the form of "prescriptive realism" associated with male, Whig writers runs the risk of cutting out "fantasy and experiments" and severely limiting "certain forms of psychic and social questioning" (Doody 294). Employing what has been described as an "innovative, protean work that anticipates the novel but is structured in the framed-nouvelle format" (Donovan 972), Barker's experiment displaces the prostitute biography to the short stories, while her narrative's "central focus is on the 'history' and development of the central, female protagonist" (975), an independent, educated and literary woman, not a woman of pleasure or crime. However, the common source also vindicates the need to study these ephemeral, disposable textual bodies to understand this generic dialogism.

Barker, quite obviously, includes this popular form in her textual assemblage, with Defoe as just another instance of it. Reversing Defoe's emphasis on verisimilitude by his use of the term 'history' and on linear progression in the description of his heroine's life story, she explicitly defines her work as a "Collection of Instructive Novels" in her title, some of which are inspired by the same genre as his but with very different moral outcomes. In fact, in her preface Barker refers to "Male Patch-workers" and, given the arguments on Defoe's narrative structure–or lack thereof–it is tempting to read this epithet as pointing to the similarities of source and structure, at the time it feminises or "domesticates" (Wilson xl) the achievements of these male writers and provides hers as superior in some senses. Her criticism of Defoe's works, and others of these characteristics, can be found in her mentions of contemporary fiction. Given Barker's moral tone and the outcome of her loose male and female characters, one can assume the use of "heroes" and "heroines" is ironic, especially as in the second of the patch-work narratives, *The Lining of the Patch-Work Screen,* Galesia will contrast the fiction of her age, full of vice, to the romances of old, filled with virtue: "Those honourable Romances of old *Arcadia, Cleopatra, Cassandra, & c.* discover a Genius of Vertue and Honour, which reign'd in the time of those Heroes, and Heroines, as well as in the Authors that report them; but the Stories of our Times are so black, that the Authors, can hardly escape being smutted, or defil'd in touching such Pitch" (129). In contrast to these "Stories of our Times", her patches include well-known moral tales and proverbs, her own poetry, and even recipes, more nourishing fiction in a literal and metaphorical sense. In others, she uses names of romantic heroes and heroines to recall the times of old, but subverts readers' expectations and displays how these stories of virtue and honour have been contaminated by the zeitgeist of her time, with stories of consumerism, greed, and lechery.[10]

This would contradict the idea that she is "claiming her 'novel' equal to his fiction and other important writings of their day" (Wilson xxxiv), in content if not in popularity. In the preface, the use of the term "history" is significant in its connotation of real-life account, as it had in Defoe's text, together with her use of the epithet "fashionable" to present them as popular fictions of her time. While still hoping to sell copies of her work–as she makes evident by talking about the "favourable Reception" (*Patch-Work* 51) of her previous works in the first line or in the prologue to *The Lining*–, Barker seems to wish to detach herself from these narratives from the onset, by, first, claiming she is "*not much of an* Historian" (52); secondly, by stating that her patch-work narrative is uncommon in the literary arena of her time (52); and, thirdly, by publicising her *Patch-Work* as particularly recommended for her "Female Readers" (51), creating a female literary community

[10] This supports Schofield's claim that Barker's work could be understood as a dissertation on different forms of romance-inspired narratives, incorporating in her work romance itself along with a critical commentary on it (*Masking* 76).

of narrators, narratees, authors and readers, far from Defoe's male implied reader[11] and ventriloquist act of impersonating a woman's voice, which could also be said of Walker's and other stories of Sally. Her notion that this is an "honourable" work for women would be emphasised in the highly moral conclusions of each piece and, relevantly for this discussion, in the instructive depiction of lewd women, some of which resort to prostitution, as didactic illustration of the consequences of choosing the "Stories of our Times". This contemporizing is key. As Swenson has convincingly argued, Barker actively engages the readers she has addressed so they will "patch" meaning in a fragmented narrative that mirrors a disjointed or fractured national and individual identity ("Representing Modernity" 56-57)–echoing Defoe's own appeal to his reader to interpret his work and find whatever instruction or sense he seems to be providing to his story of the ascendent prostitute.

If, in the narrative pattern of the middle-class model of the novel, Moll and Roxana triumphed economically and socially, even if at great personal cost, Barker adopts in both her works a more moralistic view that falls into place with the narrative model *she* has chosen. This form rejects the linear progression of the aforementioned traditional romance to amalgamate old romances with a "new kind of historical fiction" (Clarke 251), or "with the new ideological wrappings of the female moral sensibility" (Richetti, *Popular Fiction* 237), employing the traditional female audience or "symposium" as well (Richetti, *Popular Fiction* 239; Clarke 251), as stated above. This again recalls the definition of the novel born as an assemblage of past forms that project onto the future, and that brings together the literary, the historical and the ideological. In this broken state, a Jacobite woman narrator–the polar opposite of Defoe, the embodiment of those in power–threads the pieces together; she makes sense of and draws her own story of development from scorned lover to figure of wisdom and authority. Taking as possible references *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Arabian Nights* or the *Decameron*, each story is presented to illustrate vices and virtues, and to entertain and instruct its audience. Just like the *Arabian Nights*, Galesia–in Scheherazade-like fashion–weaves stories that include violence, crime, and women who are far from being an exemplary model. In the frame-novella she creates, Galesia becomes a teacher for her readers, as she threads the different narrative patches together, concluding each one with a proverb or moral. Women being the implied readers it makes sense that these interspersed stories are filled with women whose honour is compromised, and who must pay the consequences of their actions in the train of the before mentioned prostitute biographies. Barker again makes use of these well-known popular narratives of descent, disease, and possible death, and thus contributes to the consumption of these women's stories to achieve pecuniary gain, impart moral instruction, and even launch a political attack on the current Hanoverian and Protestant government (Cahill).

[11] In the above cited passages Defoe's preface addresses a male reader: "the Reader to pass *his* own Opinion upon the ensuing Sheets, and take it just as *he* pleases" (3), "give *him* a new Cast for *his* Life" (6).

Some examples in *Patch-Work* include a pre-Hogarthian country maid recently arrived in London, who is convinced by an older man at prayers that he will marry her, only to be fooled by a ring into becoming a "Left-hand Wife" (114). She is subsequently "abandon'd by her Gallant, and disabled by her Illness" (114), a venereal disease that almost kills her, and reduced to extreme poverty. The narrator, with very little sympathy, not only blames the disease on her potential lewd intercourse with other men, but also claims that her near-death experience would have culminated, in her words, "a loathsome Example of Folly and Lewdness" (115). The story's conclusion recalls Moll's, for readers are told that, after her cure, she "went away to the Plantations, those great Receptacles of such scandalous and miserable Miscreants" (115). While providing the habitual context for the fall found in later sentimental narratives–she was tricked–the tone is unsympathetic. On this occasion, Galesia tells her hostess, and her audience, that "it is not out of an Inclination to rake in such *Mud*, which produces nothing but Offence to the Senses of all virtuous Persons" that she narrates this story, but out of the need to point the lack of "Vertue and Piety" of "Devotees" (115, my emphasis). This mud is the one that smutted and defiled authors of stories of contemporary times, therefore Galesia excuses herself not to become one of them. Being familiar with the popularity of Defoe's novels, Barker seems to include nods to *Moll*, yet counteracts his more positive reading of the economic and social rise of the prostitute with the retelling of her pitiful downfall and final ostracism, which would predominate in the later age of sensibility in which repentance might still lead to being secluded from society and its wealth by becoming a nun or a Magdalen.

Patch-Work, and especially *Lining*, glosses stories of unwanted pregnancies, abandonment, fall into disgrace, social ostracism, advancing the well-known 'fallen woman' trope, which came to signify not just a prostitute but a ruined woman more generally (Binhammer 6). An example would be the Chloris of "The Story of Captain Manly", who, despite her traditionally heroic name, willingly becomes the kept woman of the married Manly. After he is punished for his immorality by being imprisoned, disobliged, then enslaved by pirates in the Ottoman empire, they reunite in Venice, where she has repented and become a nun. Barker again uses this well-known trope of the repentant or redeemed fallen woman, who pays for her sins with retirement from society in some form of banishment.

Barker also portrays willing "Strumpets", who seduce and manipulate to achieve wealth and power over their lover's household, and even his wife and children. One such example is "The History of Lysander", a common name in heroic romances, whose story takes a rather unromantic turn. Seduced by a lewd woman, he dilapidates his estate and even signs over everything he has to her. When he tells her he is going to marry Galesia, and that she should live honestly and contently with the pension he will provide, she uses her power to threaten him, to which he responds by shooting himself. Galesia concludes it is a "very fatal Warning to all unwary Gentlemen" embodied in one of them "bullied out of his Estate, Life, and Honour; his Life lost, his Debts unpaid, his Estate devour'd by a lewd Harlot!" (*Lining* 138). Thus, property is disrupted when propriety is not observed, another early

instance of one of the main themes in future novels, with sexual immorality standing for instability, disorder, social and even political disruption.[12] However, here the originality lies in the fact that there is a gender reversal, this is a story of a fallen man, a victim of women's appetites and ambitions, in the tradition of seventeenth-century misogynistic prostitute narratives (Figueroa 39). This could also be interpreted as a veiled reference to Sally's coeval stories of voracious greed and consumption, of her power over men, as compiled by Walker. Barker's conservatism and assimilated misogyny on this topic is clearly stated in the following exchange in the *Lining*: "The Men of all Qualities, Countries, and Stations, said Galecia, are alike; there is no such thing as Vertue and Honor left amongst 'em at least, in regard to their Wives; … All which, said Miranda, proceeds from the Multitude of lewd Strumpets; who *reign* amongst us with Impunity" (253, my emphasis).

Leaving aside the political reading of this passage in its analysis of the state of the present society–and court–, Barker can be seen to follow the tragic model of the prostitute narrative, in the train of the more conservative sentimental tale, but not always with its heightened sympathy. This is perfectly exemplified in the last story of the *Lining*, "The Story of Mrs. *Castoff*" (282-9). Its title, as Wilson has rightly stated, makes explicit the "[d]iscarded women" (xli) at the core of Barker's work, being a complete and more developed prostitute story which echoes Moll and advances Hogarth's harlot. The young country girl is deceived by an older woman with the promise of a better-paid job into a house of disrepute and becomes a fashionable–and voraciously consumerist–mistress, to be subsequently abandoned after the unfounded accusation that she had made her lover ill. Diseased and poor, she "resolv'd to be vertuous and modest" (*Lining* 287), and finds employment. Yet she falls again with promises of marriage, only to be deserted once more by her new foreign lover. Incapable of finding a job because of her poor character reference, she falls into night-walking at Fleet-Street and finally joins "the hundreds of Drury",[13] after having to give up her own daughter. Besides its tragic conclusion, this tale provides the more harrowing description of prostitution, very different from Defoe's tone: "Should I tell you all the Affronts, and Indignities I suffer'd here [Fleet-Street], 'twould make your Ears glow, being often beat, and made to expose myself stark-naked, for the brutal Diversion of those who pick'd up such distressed Creatures" (288-89). In this, Barker advances some of the more shocking histories of the penitents. Fleet-Street being a well-known location for writers, Barker seems to be uniting again the literal and literary when it comes to prostitution and its depiction in fiction. However, even if far from the triumphalism and comedy of Fisher's, Sally's or Moll's stories, Barker seeks to create revolt and horror in her

[12] This is a constant in the later anti-Jacobin novels, for instance, which emphasise the political reading of women's fall. See Borham-Puyal, *Quijotes con Enaguas* 73-102.

[13] Area known, among other things, for the large number of "pleasure houses"; mentioned as well in Walker's text: "the *Hospitable Hundreds* of OLD DRURY" (11). See, for instance, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol3/pp36-44 for a detailed description of this area, or https://francisplaceballads.nd.edu/the-songs/24-to-the-hundreds-of-drury-i-write/, for its description in popular ballads.

readers as a didactic trigger, at the price of commodifying the real prostitute's situation for moral, literary, or economic value, a charge recurrently levelled against subsequent writers who exploited the prostitute's plight to advance their own agenda (Binhammer).

In summary, from the perspective of her treatment of the prostitute narrative, Barker stands as a bridge between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century: her voracious strumpets trigger the associations with earlier prostitute fiction, while she also includes seduced or ruined women who do not resort to prostitution but are similar in their progression of descent, as will be seen in late-eighteenth and nineteenth novels. With Mrs. Cast-Off's story, she also advances the sentimental novel in form–crafting interrupted or broken syntax to convey overwhelming emotion as the protagonist relates her harrowing tale–,[14] and in content, with a more explicit description of the horrors of prostitution, preceding authors such as Wollstonecraft or George Egerton and their interspersed or short tales of fallen women in a world that leaves them few choices.[15]

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is possible to conclude that what today constitutes high works of fiction are influenced by these popular forms of print that convey the prostitute's story to the masses. Despite their differences, Defoe's and Barker's works are similar in their use of a tragic and salacious story to engage readers, while intertwining the sexual, social, economic, and even political dimensions that coexist in the prostitute biography. They would also open the way for subsequent works in which the prostitute's story would feature predominantly, which still proved popular for the rest of the century.[16] In addition, both Defoe and Barker choose a narrative form that also resembles these popular stories, relating different encounters or adventures, tracing a narrative path to the happy ascent or tragic descent. Barker uses each story to focus on a different character, varying the way these women become strumpets or prostitutes, and the personal, social, moral, and economic consequences of their fall. The conventional nature of the tales is highlighted by the old narrative form and the romantic names, while there is little progression, and only Galesia's narrative frame and the didactic intent of the work holds these episodes together. Yet her anti-history, her complex form, not only speaks from the position of the defeated and their fractured world, but grants the readers insights into a "complicated

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[14] "But–with that she wept, which stopt her proceeding for a while, but she soon recover'd her self" (Barker, *Lining* 284).

[15] On Wollstonecraft's inset story of Jemima, who follows a similar pattern of descent from rape, to kept woman, to street-walker, see Borham-Puyal, "Jemima's wrongs". George Egerton (1859-1945), pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne, in her short story "Gone Under" shows how a mistress finally falls into prostitution having no resources after abandoning her controlling lover.

[16] Rosenthal has compiled an extensive bibliography of prostitute narratives in the long eighteenth century *(Nightwalkers* 225-229).

subjectivity" (Swenson, "Representing Modernity" 56), Barker-as-galesia. On his part, Defoe uses a similar structure, moving from adventure to adventure, from lover to husband, although with greater sense of unity and individualism, and using the conventions of the genre to again blend fact and fiction. Therefore, these two literary works, which have not been compared under this light, display similar narrative characteristics that can be traced to popular forms, which serves to reassess the porous boundaries between popular and elite fiction, and between male canonised literature and the production of obliterated women writers, at the same time it exposes the richness of responses to this popular genre.

Equally relevant, in this cultural commerce, the literal and literary bodies of the prostitutes became commodities to be consumed by a growing market, both as part of ephemeral, cheap, popular culture, and of more lasting pieces of literature. They did so as anti-heroines, disposable textual bodies that serve to drive the plot or entertain the masses at a public spectacle, or as protagonists of a story of social and economic mobility. As illustrated by Defoe's and Barker's productions, fallen women become the embodiment of intersectional anxieties on female virtue, propriety and property, consumerism, moral corruption, and social change. Their narratives are then relevant to the understanding of eighteenth-century society and culture, and, especially, to the recovery of marginal women's voices and stories.

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